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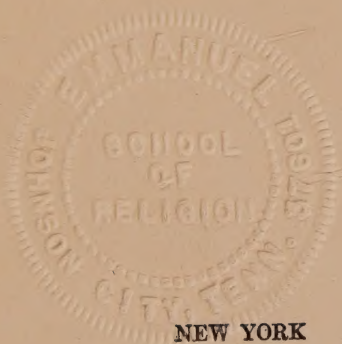




# THE LIFE OF OUR LORD IN SERMONS

BY  
REV. RICHARD COOKSON

WITH A PREFACE BY  
RIGHT REV. JOHN S. VAUGHAN, D.D.



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*Archbishop of New York*

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## PREFACE

BY RIGHT REV. JOHN S. VAUGHAN, D.D.

*Bishop of Sebastopolis*

SOLOMON tells us that "of the making of books there is no end" (Ecclesiastes, xii. 12), and this seems to be especially true of books of sermons. But this present volume is no ordinary collection of common discourses on the familiar duties and obligations of a Christian life: it is something special and original, and possesses a character and a purpose all its own. The author realizes that Jesus Christ is not only our God and our Creator, "by Whom all things were made" (John, i. 3), but He is above all things else our infinitely perfect Model and Example. Instead, therefore, of imitating the typical preacher and launching out into learned disquisitions upon the various doctrines of the Church, he sets before us the Person of the Incarnate Son of God, and seeks throughout to rivet our attention upon His earthly life and example.

Beginning with the "Expectation of the Desired of Nations," and the birth and early childhood of Jesus Christ, the author gradually opens out before our admiring gaze the beautiful history of His wonderful earthly career. In place of the very meager sketch of Our Lord's life given us by the ordinary preacher, Father Cookson has drawn for us a full life-size picture of the Man-God, with the correct *mise-en-scène*, with the appropriate surroundings and accessories, and with the many lights and shadows without which a truly satisfactory portrait is impossible.

In each discourse, our author's aim is to present not only a faithful picture of Jesus Christ, but likewise to construct for us a view of the country through which we seem to see Him moving, to give a description of



the persons with whom we seem to hear Him conversing, as well as to explain the customs and the local habits of contemporary Israel, to which Our Lord was wont to refer in many an illuminating discourse and in many a striking parable. In this way, the reader will find himself greatly assisted in his endeavor to catch the full force of the divine message, and to determine the correct interpretation of Christ's words.

Certainly, there can be nothing so interesting, so instructive, or so worthy of our earnest thought as the life and labors of Our Redeemer. The broad and general outlines of the picture are, we may confidently hope, well known and even familiar to every Catholic worthy of the name, but few know anything of the minor details—details which nevertheless are of the greatest importance. It is here that Father Cookson comes to our assistance. Indeed, there is scarcely a sermon in which the diligent reader will not gain some information that will help him to form a truer and more faithful portrait of Jesus Christ. And this is an enormous gain, for there can be no doubt but that the more faithfully and fully we appreciate the character and personality of Our Blessed Lord, the more vivid our faith will become, and the more we shall feel attracted toward Him.

Besides, in dealing with One who is both God and Man, we must surely feel that no incident can be considered unimportant, if it throws light upon His teaching, and no circumstance can be called trivial, if it helps in any way to illustrate or to determine the full import of His words.

We feel, therefore, that the Catholic public owes a debt of gratitude to Father Cookson for writing this volume, and we believe we may safely predict for it a hearty welcome as well as an extensive circulation.



## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

IN undertaking this not easy, but certainly much needed work on the Life of Christ, my main endeavor has been to afford my fellow-priests a handbook with the information and detail suitable for preparing sermons on this all-important subject.

Undoubtedly, our Catholic people are fairly familiar with the general outline of the life of the God-Man, but there is much pertaining to the times, habits and customs of that earthly sojourn, which is not known to them, and it is in this respect that I have tried to be of some service.

As this difficult task would have received better and more able treatment at the hands of scholarly men, I must say that this work was in no way due to personal inclination, but was the outcome of a suggestion made to me by the Publishers.

In preparing the following pages, I have not hesitated to quote from time to time passages or excerpts from various recognized and eminent authorities on the Life of Christ. Such extracts will always be found between inverted commas.

I am greatly indebted to Bishop John S. Vaughan for the many useful suggestions which he has so kindly given me while I was engaged on this work. Additional thanks are due to Rev. J. McGrath, C.S.Sp., who carefully perused and corrected the proofs.

Now I send forth these pages not knowing what will befall them, but my earnest prayer and sincere wish is that they may prove of some little value in making better known the Life of Lives.

RICHARD COOKSON.

*Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, 1925.*







## CONTENTS

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	PAGE
Preface by Rt. Rev. John S. Vaughan, D.D. . . . .	iii
Author's Preface . . . . .	v
1. The Expectation and the Desired of Nations . . . .	1
2. The Birth of the Child Jesus at Bethlehem . . . .	10
3. The Circumcision of the Child Jesus . . . . .	17
4. The Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple . .	26
5. The Wise Men from the East . . . . .	34
6. The Flight into Egypt . . . . .	44
7. The Life at Nazareth . . . . .	53
8. The Dawn of Man's Redemption . . . . .	64
9. The Conflict of Christ with the Tempter . . . . .	75
10. The Marriage at Cana . . . . .	84
11. The Vindication of Christ and His Mission . . . .	92
12. The Choice of the Twelve . . . . .	109
13. The Sermon on the Mount . . . . .	120
14. The Parables of Christ . . . . .	131
15. The Sea of Galilee—The Stilling of the Tempest . .	142
16. The Healing of the Demoniac . . . . .	152
17. The Multiplication of the Loaves . . . . .	162
18. The Great Confession—The Great Commission . . .	173
19. The Transfiguration . . . . .	183
20. The Question of Personal Moment . . . . .	192
21. The Lord's Prayer . . . . .	202
22. The Friends of Jesus at Bethany . . . . .	210
23. The Beginning of the World's Greatest Tragedy . .	221
24. The Last Supper . . . . .	233



	PAGE
25. The Agony, the Arrest, the Condemnation . . . . .	242
26. The Undying Tragedy . . . . .	252
27. The Empty Tomb and the Risen Christ . . . . .	263
28. The Great Forty Days . . . . .	272
29. The Close of Christ's Earthly Sojourn . . . . .	282
30. The Expediency of Christ's Departure . . . . .	289



# THE LIFE OF OUR LORD IN SERMONS

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## I. The Expectation and the Desired of Nations

AMONG the diverse and almost countless lives that have been written, none is more instructive, and surely none more replete with importance and interest, than the life of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. It is upon the life of the God-Man that we are to base and fashion our own lives, if we are to be worthy of the name Christian; hence such a life must have serious and personal concern for us all.

If biography be inviting and educative, how much more so, when it records and details the mission and the wonders of Him, who is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life"! Indeed, did not the Son of God descend from heaven to teach us the way which we must follow; the infallible truth, which perforce we have to accept and believe; and the blessed life, which we hope to obtain hereafter?

Of what use is all the boasted learning of things material and perishable, when compared with the knowledge of those things which pertain to eternal felicity? If all sorts of people at various times have manifested so much diligence, concentration, and indefatigability, in considering and ascertaining the cir-



cumstances and eventualities relating to the lives of Kings and other personages celebrated in history, is it not reasonable and expedient that the same care and endeavor should be allotted to the life of Him, who is our King, our Lawgiver, and the only One who is really worthy of our love; especially since He has been pleased to combine with the history of His sacred life that holy and divine religion which He came to bestow on mankind?

In a matter of this kind, it is sufficient to observe that Jesus Christ is the object of our study and researches, and that they cannot therefore be deemed useless or threadbare.

In reviewing the history of Christ, we must ever recognize that such a history begins not at the stable of Bethlehem, but at the very moment when man, in the person of Adam, became the victim of sin, for the history of fallen mankind records the operation of the God-Man in the world. He was in the world before He was born at Bethlehem. He illumined the world before His star appeared in the East; and the whole history of fallen man is the history of the promised Redeemer among men, ruling, guiding and enlightening.

When Adam sinned, we became sinners, and his act of disobedience brought ruin not only on himself but on all of us, for as he was the common father of all, he involved in his misery the whole human race. God was angry with us; we were guilty in His sight; we needed forgiveness and reconciliation; but how were these to be obtained or effected? The Almighty did not wish Adam and his descendants to perish in their guilt, but He devised a means in which mercy and love met each other, and in which justice and peace kissed, for at the very moment when He pronounced sentence of punishment on our first parents He told



them of a Deliverer who was to come and for whose sake He would pardon mankind. This Mediator would offer on our behalf full and complete satisfaction, and propitiation thus being made for the sins of the world, mankind would be liberated from the jaws of death.

This Deliverer was none other than our Saviour, Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, who was to become man and die for us. However God did not merely tell our first parents of this promised Messiah; He went further and taught them a religious rite by which they might have a present interest and permanent visible reminder of the work of Redemption. This religious rite was sacrifice, which continued until the Great Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross.

The purpose of the sacrifice of the Old Law was to give the chosen people a mysterious ritual to heighten the consciousness of their guilt and increase the desire and hope of the fulfillment of the future promised Redemption. It also prefigured the great propitiatory sacrifice of Christ. Here it is vital to note that as Jesus Christ was the great person announced from the beginning of the world, so all the most remarkable personages, events and ordinances were foreshadowing Him and His Mediation, and had relation to Him as the expected Deliverer of mankind. Hence, in the very foundation of the Jewish State, in the constitution of its laws, and in every important event which befell that people, all was prophetic of the future Act of Redemption, and a kind of adumbration or shadowing faintly of that more perfect law which Christ was afterwards to establish in His Church.

Moreover, that nothing might be wanting to keep the Jews in constant expectation of this, their future De-



liverer, God deputed prophets from time to time to utter predictions concerning the promised Messiah, and thus keep alive the cherished hope.

You may have witnessed the dawning of a summer day. Before the sun actually rises, a pale white streak appears in the east, whilst the stars are still twinkling in the sky overhead; then by degrees, as the light grows, objects which were before buried in darkness begin to stand out sharply against the whitening sky; the stars at length disappear, the rays of light rise up, and touch the sky, and then, lo! they flame and up comes a burning globe—the sun is risen, it is day. Just as all this happens, so it was with the coming of Christ. Ages before He appeared on earth, first the faint streak of light appeared. He gave the promise to Adam, He spoke to Abraham, and gave him a revelation of the great truth that was to be realized at the appointed time. Then the light brightened, Moses had a fuller revelation, and the Israelites who went out from Egypt to the Promised Land saw more clearly the truth than had Abraham and the old Patriarchs.

In proportion as the time approached correspondingly nearer for the coming of the Great Prophet, the predictions concerning Him became accordingly clearer and more circumstantial. All the history of the Israelites, their chastisements, their deliverance, which portrayed God's special Providence over them, were all intended to keep alive the promise given to Adam. It is also very noticeable how this idea is developed in the Psalms, for there we have much more emphatic references to Christ than in the words of Moses. In language, beautiful as it is unmistakable, the Royal Psalmist depicts for us the Messiah's persecution by the Jews, the betrayal by Judas, the Passion, the victory and triumph over death, the conversion of the



Gentiles, and how after many afflictions the Church of Christ would prevail. Of course it is well to remember that the Psalter was the Messianic hymn-book of the chosen people. Fuller and brighter grows the discernment of the prophets as time speeds on, and the rising of the day star approaches. When we examine the prophecies of Isaias we find such specific references that St. Jerome alludes to him rather as "an evangelist than a prophet."

Whatever concerns the future Redeemer, the religion He was to establish, the virgin birth, His life and death, His Resurrection, the conversion of the Gentiles through preaching, the reprobation of the Jews, and the spread of the Church, all these events are so clearly delineated that one would imagine that Isaias was an historian relating the past, rather than a prophet who was foretelling future events. When Daniel appeared he specified the exact time of the coming of the Messiah, which was to be "after seventy weeks of years."

The seer Micheas even foretells the place of the birth, "and thou, Bethlehem Ephrata, art a little one among the thousands of Juda; out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be the ruler in Israel. . . ." (Mich. v. 2).

After the prophets had done speaking, and the list of books forming the Old Testament came to a close, still the light was getting clearer and clearer, and the truth was growing more and more on men's minds, so that when Christ actually came they would be able to behold His manifestation with undazzled eyes. Accordingly we find that no argument made a more striking appeal to and impression upon the minds of learned heathens at the dawn of Christianity, nor contributed more to strengthen their faith in the history



of the Messiah, the Saviour of the world, than the predictions relating to Him in the old prophetic writings. Those eminent pagan converts were astonished to find the whole history of their Saviour's life published before He was born.

Though the Jews ever looked forward to the coming of the Messiah, we must not lose sight of the fact that even among the heathens the promised Redeemer formed the great subject of the teaching of their religious mysteries. In other words, the heathen world was waiting and longing for the coming of Him, who was to be not only the glory of His own people Israel, but also a light to the Gentiles.

According to the prophecy of Moses in the book of Genesis, Christ "shall be the expectation of nations." Surely then other peoples than the Jews were anxiously awaiting the coming of Him, who was to be the Saviour of the world.

So also in the prophecy of Aggeus, the Messiah is referred to as "the desired of all nations," and we may with a certain amount of assurance affirm that the hopes of reconciliation of all races of men lay in the birth of Christ. Then again in the very plains of Persia, mention is made of the coming of Sosiosch—the man born of a pure virgin, who was to be the oracle through whom the High and Mighty One wrought and spoke; and from the snow-clad mountains of Scandinavia we have records that its ancient peoples sighed for the advent of Baldur, who was slain yet lives forever, and at whose reappearing the world was to be regenerated. Finally we have the written evidence of a Jew, by name Philo, who was born thirty to forty years before Christ, and who never knew and believed in the promised Redeemer, yet who wrote many books in which he gives us the belief of the Jews in



Egypt, where he lived. In reading Philo's writings one sees how the minds of the Alexandrine Jews were being prepared to receive Christ.

Thus the history of the Messiah was already written and divulged before He showed Himself in person. At length the time arrived when the Expectation and the Desired of nations, who at sundry times and in diverse manners had spoken to mankind by the prophets, was to be born. According to St. Bonaventure, mankind, when it had continued in a miserable state of exile for the long and tedious space of four thousand years, and was being ruined by the havoc of sin, became at length the object of compassion and concern of the angelic host, who as soon as the fullness of time was come resolved to renew their urgent request that the Saviour of the world should come.

Since the nations were anxiously awaiting and watching for the birth of Him, Who was to redeem the world, one would have expected that the advent of this divine Visitor would have been the all-absorbing interest of the day, yet when He came, "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not" (John i. 11). We, no doubt, are amazed, if not staggered that such should be the case; but when we come to compare our attitude and behavior with that of the peoples who lived at the birth of the promised Redeemer, we have to confess that we are just as unprepared to receive Him to-day, as they were nineteen hundred years ago. Alas, we are acting precisely as the Jews did of old, for Jesus is in our midst, and we know Him not; as a matter of fact, our case is worse, for we know full well who it is that deigns to dwell in yonder tabernacle.

From morning till night, and from night till morning He waits silently and patiently in His humble abode on the altar, longing and hoping for us to come



and visit Him, and enjoy His Eucharistic presence, but we will not. Surely, with a little good-will and proper effort, we could contrive to make an occasional visit to the Blessed Sacrament, even if it was only to step into the church, fall down on our knees for a moment, and say: "My Lord and my God." How often do we hear Him whispering to us, during our moments of leisure and solitude, "Come to me all you that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you."

Yes, He invites us, but we heed not His kind invitation; He yearns for us to come and tarry with Him for a while, but we prefer to go elsewhere, in fact, anywhere but to Him. He wishes us to come and unburden our weary souls, by confiding in Him all our needs and worries, but we seek the company of any one rather than of Him.

Daily He offers Himself to us as the heavenly food, to be the support and the strength of our earthly sojourn, but how many are desirous, or will go to the trouble to partake of this Eucharistic banquet? Indeed some would rather seek and feed on the husks of swine.

How often we pass or see at a distance the House of God! Yet we do not think of Him who dwells there as the Prisoner of Love, for if we did then our visits would be more frequent.

When perforce we do come to church for Sunday Mass, are not the minds of some busy about many things but the one thing necessary, allowing their thoughts to be fixed on anything but their devotions, and do they not eagerly wait and sigh for the time when they can bid good-bye to God for another week?

Indeed, it is almost incredible how insensible, unconcerned, and neglectful some people are of the Divine Presence in our midst.

Well might Father Faber write: "Oh, the awful



solitude that reigns around the tabernacle! The rich olive tree feeds a little star of unsteady light in the Heaven of His Sanctuary, and for how many hours, night and day, is that His only honor. . . . Why stay, O Lord, why stay? Dost Thou not miss the song of Heaven and the unfailing incense of praise, and the multitude of spirits and souls, whose beings are nothing else but one burning love for Thee? The wonder is that Thou hast not altogether withdrawn this dear mystery to Heaven, and hushed the sound of Mass, and veiled the empty tabernacle."



## II. The Birth of the Child Jesus at Bethlehem

THE longings of the nations were at least to be fulfilled; the messages of the prophets were to crystallize into some recognizable reality—while the whole Jewish race were on tiptoe of expectancy—and it was just then that Christ came, for it was the “fulness of time.”

Thus arrived the point of critical importance up to which all that had previously happened, had led; it was the arrival of a given moment which completes an epoch; the hour which fills up its appointed measure and brings it to a close, and from which all that came afterwards was to date. This momentous event had been the desire and the hope of the peoples for four thousand years, and it has a very striking aspect about it, namely that the great thing happened in the most simple and ordinary way possible. So quietly and so naturally did the stupendous occurrence take place, that one feels as if it had been just an everyday incident, so unpretentiously did God become man. Yes, the Desired of nations, the promised Messiah, the Infant King, and the Saviour of mankind came into this world without any pomp or publicity, and without mighty cataclysm or rending of the heavens, but gently and as quietly as the morning dew, or the dawn of a summer's day. To a country village secluded among the hills of Galilee was shifted from Heaven the drama of man's Redemption.

The place where this Redeemer was born is known as Bethlehem; His mother, who was a young woman of the Syrian type, “full of grace,” and charm, was by



name Mary; while His foster-father, Joseph, was a poor artisan and worked as a carpenter at Nazareth, from which the Holy Family hailed. The year of His birth is not known with any certainty, but it is put about 747 according to the reckoning of the Roman calendar, on December 25th, during the reign of Augustus Cæsar, who was then Emperor of Rome. It is interesting to note that from the birth of the child Jesus we date the Christian era. At this particular time the Emperor Augustus had published an edict throughout his dominions, to the effect that "the whole [Jewish?] world should be enrolled, . . . and all went to be enrolled, every one into his own city." It was a Jewish custom to satisfy the requirements of the census at the town to which the family originally belonged, and not at each person's place of residence. Accordingly Joseph and his beloved spouse prepared to go "to the City of David, which is called Bethlehem." (Luke ii. 4.)

From their northern home at Nazareth, amid the mountains of Zabulon, the holy couple set off, and as traveling in the east is still a very slow and leisurely affair, it was likely to be still more so when we recall that Mary was near the time of her delivery. The journey must have been a weary one, as "four days of foot-travel separate Nazareth" from Bethlehem, and it would not be an idle conjecture to venture the suggestion that it must have been a distasteful and perilous journey too, as the country at that time was agitated by political strife.

Then again, as it was winter time the roads would be rough and in a torn-up condition, and even if, as St. Bonaventure infers, our Lady should have ridden on an ass for part of the way, still it must have been an exceedingly toilsome journey. The route they followed would have taken them along the country of



Esdrelon and Sichem, and where they made any halts we cannot say. After having passed through Jerusalem they would only be about two hours' journey from Bethlehem, a place alive with many historic memories, where at length they arrived. It was in the fields hard by that Ruth gleaned the corn, and there too David as a boy tended his father's sheep. Towards the East, in the direction of the Dead Sea, was the spot where Rachel was buried, for it was "in the highway that leadeth to Ephrata, this is Bethlehem" (Gen. xxxv. 19).

This spot was just a mile out of the town, on the north side, and Rachel died there in giving birth to her son Benoni, or Benjamin as he was afterwards called. Along this very same road now traveled Mary with Joseph, and she too awaited the time of her delivery. In those days, Bethlehem was not an important town. It was built on a limestone ridge seamed with deep valleys about a mile long. The slope faced the south, and on the southeast stood the fortress of Herodium.

The original name was Ephrata which signified "fruitful," afterwards it became known as Bethlehem, "House of Bread," while today it is called Beith-Lahm, the "House of Flesh."

As soon as Mary and Joseph arrived at Bethlehem they at once sought for rest and shelter. The town was thronged with travelers, all of whom had come for the census, and as the enrollment had drawn so many strangers, "there was no room for them in the inn" (Luke ii. 7).

The inn would have been a kind of hostelry, compared with which in appearance and accommodation the modern kahn of a Syrian village would be a fair copy. A kahn may be described as a rectangular



structure, built of rough stones, and generally one story in height, containing a raised and covered gallery, running along inside the walls, and a large uncovered space in the center at a lower level, on which the gallery opens. The animals are housed for the night in the central space, while the men sleep on mats spread out on raised wooden benches in the gallery.

A kahn is a public place devoid of the most ordinary furniture; there is little or no comfort in such a place, for as a rule the traveler must bring his own food, attend to his own cattle, and draw his own water from the neighboring spring; in a word, the inn was merely an abode of shelter and safety. At ordinary times the Holy Family would have found no difficulty at all in securing lodgings, for in the East it is a sacred duty to proffer hospitality. Picture then Joseph with Mary, worn out and weary with the toils and hardships of the trying journey, feeling lonely, abashed, if not disconcerted among such a busy and excited throng of strangers, seeking a place of rest, but all to no purpose, then being reduced to seek shelter in one of those natural caves, with which the chalk hills of Judea are honeycombed. These caverns, which are so numerous, are the usual shelters for cattle, being comparable to our modern stables, except that cleanliness and decent accommodations are foreign to such places. There, amid "the straw which served as bedding for the beasts, far from all assistance, on a cold winter's night" was born the Saviour of the world, and when Mary had "wrapped Him up in swaddling clothes," she "laid Him in a manger" (Luke ii. 7). The manger was of wood, and is now kept in the church of St. Mary Major at Rome, where it is enclosed in a case of solid silver, and in it lies an image of a little child, also of silver.



Now did ever a baby enter into the world amid greater poverty, and in lowlier guise, than the child Jesus? Think of it, He was born in a stable. A stable—a real stable, not the bright and graceful portico that Christian painters have imagined as the birth place of the Son of David, as if ashamed that their God should have rested amidst poor and unclean surroundings. A stable is the abode of cattle, “the prison house of those animals that labor for man,” a place that is dark, dirty, and evil-smelling: such forsooth was the spot where Jesus was born, and hence it was that “His first worshipers were animals, not men.”

But this is not the full story of that great birthday, for after the dumb creatures had worshiped their God and All, there came shepherds. According to tradition, the shepherds were tending their sheep on a little plain, a mile or so from Bethlehem. The hilly character of the land in Palestine makes it particularly adapted for the raising of flocks.

It is the custom in those climes to pasture the sheep in the open country, and the shepherd must ever be on the alert to guard his sheep from straying, from the raids of robbers, and from the attacks of wild beasts. For his stay with the flock the shepherd is equipped with a scrip, which is a bag made of the skin of a goat, containing his food. He also arms himself with a sling, which he uses for defense against wild beasts, as well as to rouse lagging or straying sheep, by dropping a stone near them. A staff, about six feet long, is however the chief sign of his office, and it is employed for a twofold purpose. During the day it is used for support in walking, while at eventide the shepherd places it over the entrance of the fold, and the sheep pass under it, one by one.

Now it was during the long wintry night watch,



that the shepherds were suddenly startled by a brightness in the sky, and by the "angel of the Lord" who "stood by them," and announced: "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy . . . for this day is born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David" (Luke ii. 9).

Then to add further awe and rapture to the scene the heavenly angelic hosts gave vent to their praise by singing: "Glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace to men of good will" (Luke ii. 14). At once the shepherds repaired to where the child Jesus was; "and they found Mary and Joseph, and the infant laying in the manger" (Luke ii. 16).

The shepherds offered what little they possessed, that little which is so much when bestowed in a spirit of love.

At this season—a season which, whether it break in sunshine or snowstorm or rain; a season when the air is full of minstrelsy of the angels, we are drawn together in reverence and meekness to gaze upon the manger in which the infant Jesus is laid. "This day, is born" to us "a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord," born in our nature, yet God over all, born of a woman who was one of His creatures. It was well that the angels sang "Glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace to men of good will."

The first Christmas message was that of peace—the peace which Christ came to make between God and man, the peace troubled consciences find in learning that the enmity is slain; peace among men, too, O this likewise will come when they have learned to confess Christ for their king. So sadly and so slowly do our thoughts travel across to our Lord and King. Give to us peace, O prince of peace, give us the spirit of peace and love. Instances are known, where sons and



daughters have stood around a loved parent's grave, and as they looked down upon it, they thought of old strifes and firmly resolved that the memory of the dead shall bring them peace.

If we have wronged others, let us say so; if others have wronged us, let us forgive, at all costs. In either case, let us take to heart the message of peace. God help us and fill us with the spirit of Thy own love and meekness. O Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world, grant us Thy peace.



### III. The Circumcision of the Child Jesus

PICK up any biography that fancy or occasion may suggest; casually glance at the life of a saint; consult the memoirs of those historical personages whose lives have given ample scope for literary genius, and if you look at the contents of any such books you will invariably find a certain and decidedly most entertaining portion devoted to childhood days. Thus you will note recorded, early reminiscences, childish prattle and artless pranks, the quaint sayings or striking incidents associated with tender years, the apparently trivial events which seemed to presage greatness, anecdotes which amuse, interest, and perhaps give evidence of marked if not unique genius, and the various traits which unmistakably portrayed a development of mind. This is but natural; indeed, a biography without such intimate touches of childish charm and early reminiscences would deprive a life of its greatest fascination, for to many the childhood days make the happiest part of the story.

Then again, a life which lacked the period of innocence and simplicity would stigmatize the author as unnatural, and not human, and I go so far as to say that such eliminations would almost constitute an anomaly, for, after all, what are children but the men and women of later days? Therefore their early days must always form a necessary feature in all biography. Yet when we come to the LIFE of lives, we find that no story can be given about its childhood, for only four events of our divine Lord's infancy have been recorded. No doubt we may have frequently



wondered, and at the same time felt somewhat acutely disappointed that so little is chronicled about the early life of the child Jesus.

We would really have expected the Evangelists, who knew who Jesus was, to have gone into great detail concerning the birth, boyhood, and the period when "Jesus advanced in wisdom, and age, and grace with God and men." Yet we can almost say that they give us practically nothing of this part of our Lord's life. The greater the personage, the greater the demand for recording every detail. Was it because the Boy was divine, or because there was a mysteriousness about Him, consequent on the virginal birth? or that He, having a high destiny before Him thought it better that a veil should be drawn over what has ever since been recognized as the hidden part of His life?

Here it is also well to note the incident which took place after the three days' loss of the Child Jesus, Who, when He was asked why He had occasioned such anxiety and pain, replied to His mother's inquiries by saying: "How is it that you sought me? did you not know that I must be about my father's business?" Then St. Luke goes on to tell us that "His mother kept all these words in her heart"; and in view of this, is it unreasonable to expect that she observed a similar reticence with regard to other circumstances in the life of her Son?

Then, too, she must have been a witness of many strange happenings which one would naturally expect to characterize the life of her Divine Son; she was aware of the stupendous secret of His Godhead, and being cognizant of His Messianic Mission, it was to be expected that she observed a holy silence. However, another explanation has been offered, in that it was customary among the Jews not to recount or record



any of the particulars associated with the earliest years of one's life. Accordingly then, it would have been very unusual, had anecdotes of childhood, incidents of His young days, and references to what appeared future greatness, been recorded in biographical form.

Even though the childhood of Jesus is without much record, none the less it will not be idle to recall certain observances which are customary in the East when a child is born. As soon as the birth is announced, at once there is great concern that it should be a boy, for sons are invariably preferred to daughters, because they contribute more to the influence and social status of the family and the clan. Once the joyful news is proclaimed, the musicians who are at the door, waiting for the announcement, give further publicity to the desired tidings by playing riotously; but if the new-comer is a daughter, then the musicians go away without playing even a note. To emphasize more the fact that a son is the prevailing desire, it is customary for a Palestinian peasant when he is asked how many children he has, not to include the daughters in his reply.

According to the Prophet Ezechiel it was usual to wash the newborn infant with warm water, and to have it well rubbed with salt; and no doubt this latter application was to strengthen the child, and it would seem that the rubbing was repeated daily for the first week. You will remember how the shepherds, when assured of the birth of the divine Child, were told of a certain sign, which was that they would "find the infant wrapped in swaddling clothes," and this custom was in vogue at the time of Ezechiel. The swaddling clothes consist of a tiny shirt, a cap, a cotton coat, and over these a long strip of calico wound tightly several times around the body, legs and arms to ensure rigidity and straightness.



Previously mention was made of the fact that only four events in the infancy of our Lord are recorded by the inspired writers, which are the Circumcision, the Presentation in the Temple, the visit of the Magi, and the Flight into Egypt, and we now propose to consider the first of these incidents. In the Book of Leviticus we read that "on the eighth day the infant shall be circumcised" (xii. 3), and so when that day arrived the ceremony was performed. This rite and legislation was a sacrament of the Old Law, and the first religious observance required by God of His chosen people.

This ceremonial was an act of initiation into the service of God, for it was a seal to the covenant made between God and Abraham, whereby it was stipulated, on God's part to bless the holy Patriarch and his posterity, and on their part, it implied and involved a compact that they would be His special people—which engagement would be testified by their observing His laws. This divine imposition continued in force until the death of Christ, and He Himself was no exception to its ruling, though He was in no way bound by such a precept, for this rite was instituted by God as a token of man's sinfulness. According to the Mosaic Law neither place nor minister was specified. Thus it apparently became the practice to circumcise children at home, and either the father or the mother performed the ceremony. Tradition suggests that the Child Jesus was circumcised in the cave at Bethlehem. At all events, we have the evidence of Pope Benedict XIV., that painters are in error when they represent the divine Infant as being circumcised in the Temple by a priest. We also have the testimony of St. Ephrem that it was done in the stable at Bethlehem, and probably by St. Joseph. Of course the only positive record about the institution of the law is that the circumcision



had to take place on the eighth day, even if that day was the Sabbath, as is confirmed by St. John (vii. 22, 23). It was on the day of His Circumcision that Christ first shed His Blood—for in this ceremony a few drops of blood were shed, and it is no wonder that one writer has described this incident as “a piece with the Crucifixion.” It was at this memorable and sacred solemnity that He received the adorable and most holy name of Jesus, a name which means “Salvation” and which ever after was connected with His long-promised and long-awaited mission of redeeming “His people from their sins.”

Though the Jewish people generally named their sons on the day of their circumcision, still, this was not of precept, for there is evidence to show that some children received their name on the day of birth, and this could not be the day they were circumcised, for that always took place on the eighth day. Furthermore, children were deemed too weak to undergo this legal ceremony before a week had elapsed. The one who held the child during this solemnity, was regarded as equivalent to our modern god-parent in Baptism. The holy name Jesus was assigned by the angel Gabriel when he appeared to our Blessed Lady, and announced “behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name JESUS.” And did not this fit in with the Messianic prophecy of Isaias? He foretold the coming of the Saviour, and the chosen people were living in expectation of this Redeemer, and when Isaias spoke of Him as “Emmanuel—God with us,” they understood thereby that He was “saving his people from their sins” (Matt. ii. 21).

Since the name was brought from Heaven by an angel, as we have already observed, St. Paul said “that every tongue should confess that the Lord Jesus



Christ is in the glory of God the Father" (Phil. ii.). Was it not a condescension that the Son of God should submit to circumcision when such an ordinance had reference to those who were born in sin, and that He who was the "Holy one of God" should allow Himself to be reputed among sinners? What greater humiliation can be conceived than that He who is the Eternal Son of God, in all things equal to the Father, should conceal His Godhead under the appearance of a sinner? It was a great act of condescension for the Almighty to lie as a helpless babe shivering in the manger, but the condescension became immeasurable when He humiliated Himself, voluntarily and designedly, to become as one of us. This was the case when He submitted to that rite whose purpose and significance was to remind mankind that all are born of sin.

What a lesson this should be to all of us, who being real and great sinners shrink from the humiliation which the law of God requires of us in order to obtain forgiveness for our evil deeds! Some people, indeed, consider it contrary to their respectability to kneel before a priest and confess that they have sinned. Yet, respectability is no protection against sin. Indeed there are sins which do not bring the offenders before the police courts, that do not put their victims in the condemned cell; sins which do not appear in the headlines of our daily papers; sins which are not cinematographed on the screens of our picture-houses, but sins, which none the less are crying out to the very vaults of heaven for vengeance; and such are sins which the cloak of *respectability* covers and conceals. A man once came up to a hermit in the desert, and said to him: "I hate sin with all my heart." The servant of God looked dubiously at him, and said: "I do not understand hating generalities. Enter into details. If you



say, I hate my spiteful temper, I hate my waywardness, I hate my malicious tongue, I hate my selfishness, I hate my acts of self-indulgence, injustice, and revenge, then I would understand you."

Yet so long as these generalities do not publicly condemn a man, *respectability* does not reckon them as of serious moment.

If patients do not pay their doctor's bills; if "milady" who follows fashion's decrees, finds it inconvenient to settle her accounts; if the calls of pleasure make it necessary to have an empty cradle; if business demands shady work and trickery; all this is grievously wrong, but it does not generally interfere with respectability. If disregard for the name of God and of holy persons amuses the company, it is quite respectable to make vulgar jests about them; and if the accomplished raconteur has a fresh repertoire of piquant scandals, he becomes an ever-welcome guest in respectable circles. In fact any breach of the decalogue is quite permissible, so long as *respectability* does not give its frown, or verdict of disapproval. *Respectability* insists upon its self-satisfied devotees getting into the lime-light, having a long list of influential friends, no matter how doubtful be their mode of life. Self-seeking and self-gratification are the order of the day, and pretense, cultured artificiality, and snobbery are all necessary prerequisites, if one wishes to be initiated into the circle of the élite. Of course on Sunday there is the cushioned pew, the richly bound but seldom-opened prayer book, and above all the fashionable attire, which will occasion comment, if not invite envy, when *respectability* has its confab after service.

Yet, if a preacher were to ascend the pulpit and address his congregation as evil-livers, adulterers, blasphemers, extortioners, thieves, scandal-mongers



and child-murderers, at once there would be a pandemonium and indignant protest. The bishop would be speedily acquainted with the so-called, unparalleled and studied insolence of him who dared to make such an undeserved, ill-founded and sensational censure and condemnation of a respectable church-going people. His Lordship would be urged to demand a public apology from the reputed offending preacher, and guarantees would be required that such a criminal slander should never be repeated.

Such a course of action would be the dignified procedure of *respectability*, for if a protest were not issued silence would be tantamount to condonation, if not acquiescence, in the condemnatory pulpit pronouncement, and that would never do.

Ah, my Brethren, I should not be surprised if the ranks of lost souls are increased year by year not so much from the prison cell, the foul alley, and from the homes of society's outcasts, as from the ranks of respectable sinners. To those who are comforting themselves that *respectability* has a large following, and that therefore it is impossible to imagine that so many will not be saved; those, too, who are dreaming that outward conformity to religion without enthusiasm for God is acceptable; those who are persuading themselves that God is not too exacting of frail human nature; those who try to convince themselves that the observance of merely Sunday Mass and Easter Duty is a passport to Heaven; those who assure themselves that they are going to have the last rites of the Church when they are dying; to all these I say: "It is high time to attend to the business of salvation." Away then with false *respectability*, and attend to the command of duty, which dictates that each should carry out whatever his sphere in life bids him do. Justify yourselves before



God, and heed not what the world and its devotees suggest, do, or command, but at all costs, cast aside that fatal and false name of what the world calls *respectability*, and be concerned chiefly about your regeneration in Jesus Christ, who came to save you and all of us from our sins.



## IV. The Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple

DURING the period of His Public Life, our divine Lord emphatically and incessantly insisted upon His Divinity, and to make this all-important claim indisputable and unforgettable, even the Father Himself attested to the divine Nature of His Son, while Christ ratified it by the evidence of countless miracles. He also showed how He was the fulfillment of those prophecies made regarding the Messiah during the many years prior to His long-promised and eagerly-desired advent.

Now, when a particular event is predicted with certainty and precision, so that it excludes all ambiguity and conjecture, we must allow that this prediction can only be attributed to the intervention of God—for none but He can know with surety a future free circumstance. As we are aware, there existed in the Old Covenant men who prophesied and depicted in marvelous detail various episodes and situations in the life of the Promised Messiah. The incidents foretold with such exactitude, seemed more like facts recorded by a historian than events which would take place centuries later.

Surely then, when Christ showed beyond contention that He was the very fulfillment of these prophecies, is it not casting aside all reason and the irrefutable evidence of circumstance to endeavor to contest His claim to being the Promised Messiah, and therefore, likewise, just as irrational to call into question His Divinity.



If you recall the occasion after the healing of the man who had been the victim of some serious infirmity for thirty-eight years, you will perhaps remember that this miracle led to a definite statement on the part of our divine Lord as to His being equal to the Father.

As though this testimony were insufficient for those who challenged His Godhead, He bade them: "Search the scriptures . . . and the same are they that give testimony of me." Thus He went on to say that Moses, in whom they had great trust, wrote about Him, yet they ignored his evidence, hence then, as Christ affirmed, "how will you believe my words when you do not believe his writings?"

Now the episode of the Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple is yet another argument in which the Divinity is verified by the fulfillment of prophecies. It was in accordance with the Mosaic Dispensation that on the fortieth day after the birth of a son, the eightieth if a daughter, the mother and her child should repair to the Temple for "their" Purification, and it was to fulfill this obligation that the Holy Family journeyed to Jerusalem. Centuries before this incident in the life of the divine Child, Isaias and Malachy had foretold that He would visit the Temple, while Aggeus, five hundred years previously, had also made a striking reference to the occasion. When the prophet made his prediction, the Jews had returned from the Babylonian captivity, and they were busily engaged in the rebuilding of the Temple. It appears that the old men could not refrain from tears while they were working, for the splendor of the former Temple that had disappeared far surpassed their present undertaking.

To comfort and console them in their efforts, the



holy prophet told them that the former Temple, though the masterpiece of Solomon, and the glory of the then-known world, would be even outshone in glory, for the Temple which they were now constructing would be honored by the Saviour of the world entering its precincts. No doubt this led St. Bonaventure to write that famous passage which runs: "Thus then do they bring the Lord of the Temple to the Temple of the Lord."

The prophecy of Aggeus was realized on the day of the Presentation of the child Jesus in the Temple, for the presence of the long-promised Messiah glorified and sanctified the house of God.

Though there is no exact text before the Exodus to show that God demanded the firstborn of every creature to be offered to Him, still it is not altogether unreasonable to suggest that Abel's offering the firstling of his flock might indicate and involve a similar obligation on the firstborn of children. Since the first fruits of the earth and trees were to be presented to the Lord, to testify to His supreme dominion over them, why should not then the firstborn of man be offered to God, especially when we consider that man was first and foremost to be consecrated to the service of his Maker? If this offering did already hold in the early ages of man's existence, it is easily understood that it became the law after the firstborn of man and beast had been saved from the hand of the destroying angel, on the night when he slew so many of the Egyptians.

It was on the expiration of the forty days prescribed by the law that Mary along with her Child and Joseph set out for Jerusalem. From Bethlehem the holy city was about six miles distant, so that in a couple of hours they would be at the city gates.

Almost every ancient city of any note had its various gates, and it would seem that in those far-off



days, nearly all public transactions took place at, or near the gates. Throughout sacred history and prophecy the gates are celebrated for, and connected with, numberless interesting incidents and allusions. The gateway was vaulted, shady and cool, hence people delighted to assemble there; in fact many would resort there to see and be seen. Public proclamations were made at these centers of gatherings; we read also of justice and judgment being decreed there, while they were the rendezvous for gathering the news, or for engaging in traffic or trade. Any traveler entering the city of Jerusalem would have to submit to the scrutiny and the comments of those who loitered round these entrances. However, there is no reason to suppose that the Holy Family would arouse even passing attention or excite much curiosity, as they proceeded to the Temple.

The sacred edifice which was the object of their visit, was situated on Mt. Moriah, and though constructed under the directions of Zorobabel, had had several additions made to it by King Herod, and these were nearly completed at the time of the Presentation. The Temple proper was composed of the Holy of Holies and the Holy Place.

The Holy of Holies, where in the days before the captivity rested the Ark of the Covenant, was now empty and bare, save for a huge stone, which marked the spot where the Ark had stood. Only the High Priest entered this hallowed Sanctuary, and that once a year. Cut off from the Holy of Holies by a double veil was the Holy Place, in which there were three sacred objects: the Altar of Perfumes, upon which the sacrifice of incense took place, the Table of the Loaves of Proposition on the right, and on the left the golden seven-branched candlestick. Apart from the Temple proper



there were a number of courts. On the lowest terrace there was the Court of the Gentiles. The pagans were allowed to frequent this section, but they were not, under the penalty of death, allowed to trespass into any other court; and to remind them of this strict injunction, inscriptions were posted up in various languages.

Beyond this was the second terrace, some twenty or thirty feet above the first, and called the Court of the Israelites, because it was reserved for the Jews; but only the male section was allowed into its precincts, for the women had their own court where they worshiped, though it was not reserved exclusively for them. Ascending by fifteen steps from the Court of the Israelites there was the Court of the Levites, with the Altar of Holocausts in the middle. Now when Mary presented the Child Jesus in the Temple, it must have been before the Gate of Nicanor, which was the principal entrance and the place for the purification of lepers and of women after childbirth. The usual offering on the occasion of a mother and her child being presented at the Temple was a yearling lamb for a burnt-offering, and a young pigeon or a turtle-dove for a sin-offering; but those who could not afford this had to bring instead two turtle-doves or two young pigeons. It was with the offering of the poor that Mary presented herself to the priest. The twofold law of purification and presentation did not in actual fact bind Jesus nor Mary, for He who was born to redeem the world required no redemption, whilst His mother had contracted no stain from which she had to be purified.

Of the Presentation and the Purification no further details are recorded, but this visit to the Temple was made memorable by the unexpected and significant recognition of the Child by Simeon and



Anna. It would seem that Simeon had been led by the Spirit of God to the Temple at the very moment that Jesus was being presented; and, as this holy man had asked God that he might see the Messiah, he was thus privileged to behold the Holy Child. Of Simeon we are merely told that he was a god-fearing man, apparently endowed with prophecy. It seems to have been his constant prayer that he might see the future Redeemer. He had received a divine intimation that his prayer would be granted.

The Temple of Jerusalem was essentially a *house of prayer* and of course all sacrifices took place in those hallowed precincts. The Jews prayed thrice daily, and no matter where they were, at home or abroad, they always turned in the direction of the Temple. On the Day of Atonement a confession of the sins of the people in general was made by the High Priest; and special prayers of thanksgiving were prescribed when offering the first fruits of the earth. They usually prostrated themselves when engaged in prayer, and if the prayers were offered in the Temple they had more efficacy. The Psalms were the favorite form of prayer employed by the Jews, but it must be observed that sacrifice was the chief rite of the Jewish religion. If, while in the Temple, some one had pointed out to Simeon that the Holy Child whom Mary held in her arms was the long-expected Messiah, he might have doubted the fact, but when a sudden divine illumination made known to him that this Child was the Saviour of the world he at once recognized the Son of God under the veil of His human nature. Taking the Divine Infant in his arms, and being seized by a holy transport of joy, he gave vent to the beautiful prayer, known as the Canticle of Simeon, and beginning with the words: "Now, Thou dost dismiss Thy servant, O



Lord, according to Thy word in peace; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.”

To this hymn of praise Simeon added the prediction which announced the opposition of the Jews to the Messiah, and which would culminate in the awful tragedy of Calvary. Mary, no doubt, understood the sad and momentous purport of Simeon’s prophecy, a prophecy which foretold of the sad death of Jesus, and the sufferings of His mother. On this solemn occasion there entered upon the scene another witness who was to speak of the future Redeemer, and this was none other than the devout woman, Anna, who was a prophetess. For seven years this daughter of Phanuel had lived a married life, then, becoming a widow, she had devoted her time and labors to the service of the Temple. She likewise gave thanks unto the Lord, and she also gave unmistakable testimony to the Divinity of Christ.

The Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple is celebrated by the Church on the Feast of the Purification of our Blessed Lady, which feast is also called Candlemas Day, because on that occasion candles are blessed and distributed to the people. It is the usual and should be the general practice for Catholics to procure these candles, take them home with them, and keep them for sick calls and devotional purposes.

However, as a useful application of this episode of the Child Jesus being presented in the Temple, we shall perhaps derive some instruction if we make the rite of churching the subject for our attention. At any rate it may have the efficacious effect of dispelling some erroneous if not uncharitable notions which seem to be prevailing in some people’s minds. It must be borne in mind that the Jewish rite of purification was founded on the idea of legal defilement resulting from having



given birth to a child, for according to the Mosaic dispensation the mother was unclean until she had fulfilled the days of her purification.

There is no such Church law in the religion of Christ. The Church recommends "churching" as an act of thanksgiving; and though all mothers should be ever ready to return thanks to God for a safe delivery, none the less, there is no law or ruling bidding any mother to come to church to acknowledge her gratitude.

Just as our Lady made an offering to the priest on the occasion of her Purification, so also should every mother make an offering to the priest, when she has been churched. Of course, if circumstances render it impossible for any mother to give an offering, then let not the fact that she is not blessed with the good things of this world be a reason for depriving her of the blessing of the Church. It would appear that in some instances mothers have imagined that because there is no obligation to be churched, they can therefore ignore these spiritual benefits. Here let it be emphasized that such an opinion would not be in accordance with true Catholic spirit and tradition.

In the blessing which mothers receive in "churching" special graces are bestowed by God, and Catholic mothers should not willingly forego the opportunity to receive this great blessing.



## V. The Wise Men from the East

For the visit of the Wise Men from the East to the Holy Child in the manger at Bethlehem there is little Gospel record, and what is given, is open to varied comment. Hence at the outset, it is necessary to emphasize that it is in no wise our intention to postulate new theories, or in any way to violate the hallowed precincts of tradition. The visit of the Magi to the child Jesus, should be of momentous historic value to Christianity, for it is the very first appearance of Christ to the Gentiles. Hence the name Epiphany, which means "manifestation."

Though we usually style them as kings, there is no testimony to sanction such a belief, and if we accept the opinions of the Fathers of the Church, then we shall have to aver that they were not kings at all, but merely personages of high rank.

At all events, there seems no doubt that the Magi were of a priestly caste, of keen intellectual attainments, well versed in astronomy, certainly held in the highest repute among their country-folk; and they stood for what was spiritual amongst a materially-minded generation. Although St. Matthew styles them Magi, we must not assume therefore that they were magicians, for they followed fundamentally the religion of Zoroaster, and this cult did not in any shape or form countenance sorcery. Their skill in astronomy, which no doubt in those days went hand in hand with astrology (which was the science of predicting



events by consulting the starry heavens), may have led some to imagine that they were magicians.

We now come to the question of number, and granting that they are generally if not always regarded to-day as three, still the Scripture narrative gives no detail in this respect. The allusion to the triple gifts has led to the idea that the Magi were three in number, and such is certainly the accepted opinion.

According to St. Bede there were only three and he records their names. This servant of God, who was indeed a great historian, and who derived his information from Roman writings, tradition, and native sources, gives not only their names, but their country, and even their personal appearance.

Melchior, he tells us, was an old man, wore a long beard, and had white hair; Caspar was of ruddy complexion, but beardless; while Balthasar was swarthy, and in the very prime of life. We are further informed by tradition, though still it is more probably a purely legendary notion, that Melchior was a descendant of Sem, Caspar of Cham, and Balthasar of Japhet. Then, if such be the case, the three original families of the earth were represented.

In the Cathedral of Cologne the skulls of the Magi are exhibited amongst the relics, and each skull is encircled with a crown of gold.

Whence the Wise Men came, is unknown. St. Matthew merely says they were from "the East" but as this is a vague geographical term, we are left to conjecture.

Daniel and the other later prophets and historians make frequent mention of the Magi, but these references give no indication as to the nationality of the Wise Men. The only conclusion to be derived from the



gospel narrative, is that they came from somewhere "east" of Palestine.

If we adhere to tradition as reflected in the paintings of the Catacombs, and to other religious art, as well as ancient classical maps, then the Magi hailed from Persia. Fouard in his *Life of Christ* says that "the high head-dress, the tunic girded at the loins, over which floats a mantle thrown back over the shoulders, the legs bare or covered with boots, closely bound with thongs" which is the dress which they are always represented as wearing, is the costume of the Persians. But the gifts of myrrh and frankincense which the wise men offered to the Infant King are products of Arabia, and this fact along with the reference of the Royal Psalmist to "the kings of the Arabians" bringing gifts, has been responsible for some people fancying that they were from Arabia. It is, however, more to our immediate purpose to ascertain why it was that the Magi made their memorable visit to the Child Jesus.

Profane history informs us that at this particular period there prevailed throughout the entire East a conviction, which was the outcome of prophecies, that at a not far distant date a powerful monarch would appear in Judea, and eventually gain dominion over the then-known world. Beyond the boundaries of Israel, there were nations who were expecting the advent of a Redeemer, and it was but natural then that the Magi, who were familiar with the prophets and were learned, should be on the alert for any inkling or indication which would suggest His coming. Mindful too of Balaam's prophecy that "a star shall rise out of Jacob, and a scepter shall spring up from Israel . . ." they—for as already remarked they were keen astronomers—would be attentively searching the starry skies for the appearance of some heavenly



body, which would indicate the arrival of the great king.

Thus we can easily conceive how they would be watching with eagerness, if not concern, the apparent revolutions of the stars, the movements of the planets, the courses of the comets, and the calculated eclipses, with the purpose of missing nothing which would warn them of the prophetic apparition in the heavens. They were familiar with the relative positions and courses of the heavenly bodies; thus when they beheld anything in the shape of a prodigy, the remembrance of the prediction of a New Star would instantly lead them to suspect its connection with the prophecy of Balaam.

That a strange brilliant phenomenon among the starry system should be taken as a signal of the birth of the King, was in strict accordance with the tradition and belief of the times. The sudden appearance of the long-expected star would produce a spirit of awe, superhuman concern, and intense enthusiasm, and no doubt there would be an interior impulse bidding, nay, urging the Wise Men to go forth and seek the divine Majesty.

Obedient to this God-given omen and celestial message, the Magi straightway prepared for the journey, in order to pay homage to the newborn King. Whether the star appeared before the birth of the Child or after it, or contemporaneously with it, is not related; hence the obvious uncertainty as to when exactly the Wise Men arrived at Bethlehem.

More recent interpreters are inclined to place the visit of the Magi after the presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple; because if it had been otherwise Mary and the Child would have probably fallen into the clutches of Herod and his blood-thirsty emissaries. Then again, our blessed Lady would not have had oc-



casion to give the offering of the poor, for she would have been able to produce the valuable gifts of the Wise Men.

The star, which the Wise Men are recorded to have seen in the East could not have been a star in the strict sense of the word, for all stars are fixed, and the nearest of them is far too remote, and far too immense to signalize any particular house or spot like Bethlehem.

St. Chrysostom does not hesitate to proffer the suggestion, that it was an angel who assumed the form of a star. At all events, it appears to have been a miraculous shining prodigy, situated in the lower region of the heavens and faithfully acting the part of the guide to the Magi, and perhaps it may have been something comparable to the pillar of fire which led the Israelites to the Promised Land. Whatever the apparition may have been, it made the Wise Men irresistibly go and seek the long-expected Messiah.

The journey which they were about to take, was no easy or everyday task, for it involved much preparation, and it must be ever remembered that they were going to visit a King, and such an errand would have to be in keeping with the solemn and auspicious occasion.

Accompanied by a princely retinue, and taking rich presents, they set out on their journey. In the East, a caravan only travels by night, for the excessive heat of the sun makes it practically impossible to proceed by day. Thus during the daytime it is customary for the travelers to rest, and it affords an opportunity for the camels to pasture. It has been suggested that for a good part of the way the Magi followed the route that Abraham would have taken when emigrating from Chaldea to the land of Chanaan. For many days, they would, so to speak, plod their way through the desert, for



traveling on camels is not a comfortable or speedy process. Their arrival at Jerusalem, would occasion much stir; such an imposing caravan must have invited not a little curiosity, given rise to gossip and idle inquiries, and filled the street loiterers with topics for discussion. Though the city of Jerusalem was used to witnessing caravans from the East, with their quaint costumes and long files of heavily laden camels, still this particular one by reason of its regal appearance could not but excite attention, inquisitiveness and comment. But what must have been the surprise, if not consternation, when the Magi asked: "Where is He that is born the King of Jews?"

"What!" the people would say, "a new King? Why, Herod is not dead, and though he has reigned for thirty-six years, there is no sign or mention of his resigning; surely you have got hold of some foolish rumor." Then the Wise Men would retort, "Why we have seen His star in the East, and we are come to adore Him." From lip to lip would fly this marvelous news, and ere long it would reach the ears of Herod himself, and if it had occasioned surprise in the minds of the people, certainly it would fill the old king with fear and trembling. Indeed such was the case, for does not St. Matthew tell us that "Herod the King hearing this was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him"?

The inhabitants of the city had reason to be alarmed, for they feared the measures Herod would take to rid himself of the usurper.

As soon as he had recovered somewhat from the shock, Herod at once called a great council of the chief priests and scribes, who were the doctors of the Law, and "he inquired of them, where Christ should be born."



Without asking time for inquiry or discussion the assembled gathering unanimously replied, "in Bethlehem of Judea," and as if to give indisputable confirmation to their reply they cited the prophecy of Micheas, who had said: "And thou, Bethlehem, the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come forth the captain that shall rule my people, Israel" (Micheas v. 2).

Satisfied that he now knew who his hated rival was, he dismissed the council, but in order to make his information more complete, Herod decided to interview the noble strangers, and question them about the event which had occasioned their visit, and which, also, had occasioned him much agitation and concern. He evidently dissimulated the purpose and the importance of his inquiry, for it does not appear that the Magi suspected the plot hidden under what would seem a natural proceeding on the part of a king.

It is perfectly obvious that they were not aware of the hideous and ambitious history of this jealous-minded and intriguing scoundrel, who was now out to perpetrate yet another murder, and the sinister inquiry of this blood-thirsty wretch was by them regarded as natural curiosity, if not pious intention. Having finished their audience with Herod, they at once departed. Scarcely had they left the city of Jerusalem, than the star which they had seen in the East, suddenly reappeared before them.

This miraculous guide now went before them till it came to where the Child was, and then stood over the spot. On entering the house, they found the Child with Mary His mother, and falling down they worshiped Him; after which they offered their princely gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These offerings were in keeping with Oriental tradition. Some



seem to imagine that the Child and our blessed Lady were still in the stable, but there is no evidence to show that such was the case. It must be observed that the homage which the Magi paid to the Infant King was not merely civil fealty, indeed it was adoration pure and simple, an act which was due only to God.

There is no record to assure us of their Faith, but such a devout and submissive protestation on the part of the Magi speaks volumes for their homage, which could only be the outcome of true Faith.

Herod was anxiously awaiting their return, and the Wise Men would certainly have reported to that murderous tyrant the result of their visit, had not God warned them in a dream of the wicked project of him, who, at Jerusalem, was so intent on coming to adore the newborn King. Accordingly, being thus apprised of the perfidious designs of Herod, they returned by another route into their own country. The Wise Men now vanish from the scene, and no further trace of them is to be found in Scripture. Let us now consider the lesson that this memorable event suggests. The adoration or worship which the Magi paid to their Lord and God, and the offerings which they presented to Him, should teach us the same duty, and should instil into us the same disposition with which we should fulfill our duty of worship. Nothing is more important; nothing is more common; and yet nothing more irksome to some people and more carelessly and heartlessly performed, than the worship of God.

As Catholics we readily realize the importance of worship; therefore there is no need to discuss the aspect of its necessity, but there is certainly need to emphasize the fact that there is danger of such a duty being turned from the worship of the mind and heart to the worship of the knee and lip. In proportion as the wor-



ship wants heart it will want spirituality, but with many people it is a mere form, and nothing but bodily presence, and to them applies the censure which our Lord directed against the Pharisees: "This people honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." How important then that when we come to Mass we should be devout, thoughtful, sincere and earnest!

Thus we should come to Sunday Mass, not because it is sinful to neglect such a duty, or because we are accustomed to attend or because our absence might occasion unpleasantness, but solely because it is a solemn duty we owe to God. God commanded in the Old Testament that man should worship Him. Christ sanctioned it in the New Law, the Apostles congregated together for the purpose of worship, and Christianity ever since has recognized this paramount obligation. Since it is our duty to worship God, it is also our bounden duty to give Him the best worship of our hearts, and it certainly is imperative that we make use of the best means to attain such a result.

The worship with which God is pleased and which He desires of His creatures, is that of an humble and contrite heart—the love, the gratitude and obedience of sincere hearts. Thus He abominates and condemns the giving of forms instead of the heart, offering of lip service instead of the service of the mind. Those who come to Mass, and make it an occasion for seeing and being seen, who cannot abstain from staring about during the Holy Sacrifice, are offering to God not worship but an insult. Those who pretend to be most solemn and pious, but are so easily distracted by the fidgetiness of some child hard by; those who in outward appearance are most devout and attentive to the reading of their prayer book but are thinking of profane and perhaps unholy things, or who strive to satisfy an



offended conscience and please a grieved God by mere externalisms, are offering a worship of mockery and hypocrisy.

How many come to Mass, apparently for the purpose of worship, yet instead are there merely because they do not wish to become absolute atheists, and instead of giving God His due, are busily occupied in worshipping the idol of self, money, ease, family, pleasure, anything forsooth but God. My Brethren, if our worship is not the worship of a sincere and humble heart; if our service is not the service of a soul yearning after God; if we do not, when here, desire God more than anything else, and thirst after Him, as the hart does after the fountains of water, then our worship is worthless, and our religion is vain. Think of it before it is too late, before you stand in the presence of a neglected and forgotten God; remember it is our first and foremost duty to perform divine worship with all earnestness, efficiency and determination.



## VI. The Flight into Egypt

THE Wise Men had come from the East, had paid their visit, fallen down and adored the Infant King at Bethlehem, and after making profound acknowledgment of His supremacy as the King of Kings, they offered Him their gifts. The purpose of their visit realized—for did they not “come to adore Him”?—the Magi would naturally have returned to Herod, and acquainted him of the whereabouts of the newborn King, but in a dream, which they recognized as a divine intervention, they were warned not to retrace their steps to Jerusalem. They departed to their own country by another way. Thus was the evil purpose of Herod thwarted and the divine Child saved.

Yet, as we can naturally imagine, Herod would be anxiously and impatiently awaiting the return of the Wise Men; indeed he would probably be distraught with something akin to frenzy, for even the suggestion, much less the possibility, of a rival or a pretender would fill him with wrath and murderous intent. When he had hoodwinked them with the idea and the assurance that he too would wish to come and adore this newborn King, he felt convinced that such a clever and wary suggestion or pretext would afford him the necessary and eagerly sought opportunity of putting an end to any possible claimant to the throne.

Had the Wise Men been familiar with Herod's past history, they would certainly not have made any reference to a newborn King, but evidently they were



not aware that, since he came to power, his whole career had been made scarlet with the blood of those who had aroused his suspicions and had excited his jealousy. This unbounded, ambitious and vile monster can well merit the name Great, if a record list of atrocities and murders is a satisfactory and fair basis for establishing such a reputation, or claim to fame. By birth he was an Idumean and thus he was of Hebrew extraction, for the Idumeans had been brought "under subjection by Hyrcanus" and obliged to live as Jews, and so they were regarded as such.

His father Antipater had done not a little to further and safeguard the interests and policy of Rome, with the result that the Herodian family soon attained power and prominence. Herod can be described as incomparably ambitious and violently jealous, avid for riches and glory, suspicious beyond expression, ever living in fear and terror of revolt and insurrection, and, in accordance with the depraved ideals of those times, he was an ardent votary of the voluptuous. Though some writer styles Herod "the evil genius of the Judean nation," there is no doubt that he was a gifted and talented man and gave evidence of his ability and attainments. Once he felt himself supreme and immune from the intrigues of his enemies, he adorned his kingdom by the erection of various monuments. He built cities, raised temples in honor of the Emperor and the gods, and added numerous improvements and embellishments to the Temple at Jerusalem. Caesarea with its fine harbor was his handiwork, while theaters and hippodromes for games were also constructed at his command and design, and other notable works which are attributed to him give proof of his ability.

Unfortunately, Herod seemed more intent on exercising his powers in the wrong direction, as the horrors



which characterized his reign emphatically show. Indeed, he had scarcely ascended the throne than he schemed for the removal of Antigonus whom he had conquered, and forthwith this victim was beheaded. His own sons, Alexander and Aristobulus, he had strangled; whilst his brother-in-law was drowned by his command in a bath at Jericho. When we record such instances of his inhuman atrocities, and on pretexts as flimsy as they were fiendish, is there any wonder or occasion for surprise that the mention of a newborn King should at once prompt and impel him to seize the would-be rival, and put him to death?

But his schemes and devices were brought to naught, for as soon as the Wise Men had taken leave of the Infant King, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in his sleep, and bade him take the Child and His Mother, and flee into Egypt.

Instantly the Holy Family gave heed to this divine warning, and as they were able to flee from the scene of pending destruction, it would be of minor consequence what inconvenience, hardship, and fatigue they had to experience, so long as they escaped the clutches of the would-be murderer.

Still this sudden command must have occasioned a terrible shock to Mary and Joseph; and keen too must have been the feeling of horror, trepidation, and concern at being reduced to the painful necessity of leaving their native land at a moment's notice, and betaking themselves into a foreign and distant country. At a nocturnal hour, in the arms of His mother, who was seated on an ass, rocked too by the swaying of the animal as it leisurely made its way through the trackless wastes, the Babe of Bethlehem, at an age too tender for so laborious a journey, was forced to seek shelter and safety amongst strangers. He who was the King



of kings was perforce driven into exile, lest He should fall into the hands of one, who was but a creature, a mere vassal, a servant, why nothing less than a slave; nay from one who was a devil incarnate. Surely, for the God-Man to submit to such an expediency must make us realize how human He was after all.

Of the flight and the route the Holy Family took, Sacred Scripture gives no particulars; but this we do know, that from the mountains of Judea to the river Rhinoculera, which divided Egypt from the territory of Herod, would be a three days' journey, and they would not be beyond the reach of his jurisdiction until they were on the further bank of that river.

Though the Gospel records nothing of the long tedious journey, and is also silent as to the part of Egypt where the holy fugitives took up their abode; still there is a store of legendary detail which pertains to the exile of the Child Jesus. One old legend has it, that while on their journey, the holy travelers fell into the hands of reckless brigands, but the captain of the gang being suspicious that there was something superhuman about the Child and its parents, gave orders for their immediate release.

This robber chief is supposed to be identical with the good thief who was on Calvary, with His crucified Master, on Good Friday.

The apocryphal gospels—that is the books whose authenticity as inspired writings is not admitted—are replete with many marvels and strange stories in connection with the flight into Egypt.

Thus the Egyptians were given up to all kinds of idolatry, and according to these legends, on the entrance of the divine Child into their country, the idols fell from their pedestals, and lay shattered in countless pieces. It is worthy of mention, that if the idols



did actually fall to pieces, on the entrance of the Child into the land of the idolatrous Egyptians, then the prophecy given by Isaias was literally fulfilled, for he predicted that the "Lord will . . . enter Egypt, and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence" (Isaias, xix. 1).

Though no particulars are given as to where the Holy Family took refuge, still there is an accepted impression that they dwelt at Heliopolis, the City of the Sun. About this time, Egypt had become the refuge for many unfortunate, persecuted, exiled Jews, and it does not seem unlikely that Joseph would be acquainted, if not familiar with, some of his countrymen, who, like himself, had been compelled to seek safety and shelter in those parts. These Jewish colonists were so numerous in the land of the Nile, that they had built a temple in the district of Heliopolis, and it was reputed to rival if not surpass the Temple at Jerusalem. As St. Matthew does not record where, and how long the Holy Family resided in Egypt, it is more to our purpose to review now the event which history has immortalized as the ruthless massacre of the Holy Innocents.

Surprised and beside himself with fury, Herod let his alarm and jealousy follow its customary course, and thus the old despot who had marked nearly every year of his reign by murder, so to make absolutely certain that this newborn, would-be claimant to the throne should not remain alive, issued the order to his inhuman soldiery that they should make a general massacre of "all men children that were in Bethlehem, and all the confines thereof, from two years old and under" (Matt. ii. 16). By such a sweeping slaughter he felt assured that no likely pretender would escape, for he knew that the child whom the Magi had come



to visit was only recently born. The number of infants who were thus murdered to satiate the ambition and ferocity of this heartless monarch, "wife-murderer and slayer of his own offspring," has not been chronicled. However, as only Bethlehem and its vicinity came under the murderous edict, and as the population then would not, in all probability, be larger than to-day, it cannot be far beside the mark to compute the number of massacred children at 70 or 80. At all events, the Greek traditional estimate of thousands is not in keeping with the usually accepted number.

It is likewise impossible to assign the day or the year; suffice it to say that this unprecedented butchery occurred within two years of the birth of Christ. But the wild wail of anguish which arose from the mothers thus robbed of their infant children could not be hushed, and they who heard it might well imagine that Rachel, the great ancestress of their race, whose tomb stands by the roadside about a mile from Bethlehem, once more, as in the pathetic image of the prophet, mingled her voice with the mourning and lamentation of those who wept so inconsolably for their murdered little ones. Thus was accomplished that which had been predicted by the prophet Jeremias: "A voice in Rama was heard, lamentation and great mourning; Rachel bewailing her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not." Jeremias speaks of Rachel, weeping over the capture of the Israelites by Assyria; but the realization of the prophecy is seen in her lament consequent on the attempt to kill the newborn Messiah. Apparently not long after this unforgettable episode, Herod succumbed to a loathsome disease, which was a horrid form of decomposition, a kind of living death. So intolerable were his agonies, and so disgusting even to himself was his malady, that



he attempted to commit suicide a few days before he actually succumbed to his dire affliction.

The death of Herod the Great was so eagerly awaited that the news of it was greeted with joy; and to mark the event with fitting pomp and circumstance, it was observed as a festival day. The reign of terror and tyranny now ended, a heaven-sent messenger speedily intimated to Joseph that he was dead "that sought the life of the child." Forthwith Joseph obeyed the angelic adviser, and he left Egypt with the Child and His mother.

Thus we see how the prophetic utterance of Osee came to pass, for in inspired anticipation he wrote: "Out of Egypt have I called my son," and, of course, this had direct reference to the Child Jesus. As the Holy Family journeyed back to their own country, they learnt that the new King Archelaus was pursuing a similar policy to that of his father, and feeling that there would be no safety or tolerance under such oppression and iniquity, they, in obedience to heavenly intimation, betook themselves to Galilee, where in the town of Nazareth they dwelt in obscurity, poverty and insignificance.

Though nineteen hundred years have now elapsed since the Flight into Egypt and the massacre of the Innocents by Herod, still it would seem that this child-slaying, self-seeking monster has a worthy and large following of enthusiastic devotees and ardent rivals, for are there not, in our midst to-day, people who are just as intent and insistent on child-murder as was that voluptuous and villainous slayer of long ago? I speak of those men and women who advocate and put into practice birth-control, a practice which I am grieved to state is steadily, systematically and increasingly finding its way into the homes of Catholic



people,—a practice too, which is murder pure and simple, in that it is a direct attempt and prearranged effort to tamper with and destroy the divinely-appointed source of human life. Time was when a childless wife was an exception and an object of commiseration; now it is no longer an exception, nay, what is revoltingly worse, it is made the occasion for self-gratification and rejoicing. I venture to assert, and I know it is in no way opposed to the findings and dictates of truth, that in these days of self-seeking and responsibility-shirking, there are young prospective married people who mutually and even boastfully arrange that their married life is not, as they put it, going to be hampered and spoilt by the birth of too many children.

Now it is important to realize and ponder over this indisputable and alarming fact, namely that those who enter on matrimonial alliances for the sole purpose of pandering to and satiating sexual craving, and with the expressed mutual undertaking not to have children, commit a violation of the primary end of matrimony. Hence let it be known to these misguided self-willed voluptuaries, that though they have conformed to the marriage legislation of the Church, none the less, if their predominating intention was to exclude all possibility of children, then there was no marriage. Of course, legitimate, mutual abstention from conjugal intercourse in no way incurs any censure or ban. But the use of means and devices which are employed to prevent the procreation of children, is a grave violation of the Fifth Commandment, which says: "Thou shalt not kill," and such a serious breach of this precept cannot and will not go unpunished. I grant that these artful offenders who go in for the empty cradle will not be reputed or branded by the community as murderers;



I grant that they will not be hounded to death by the law; I grant too that they will not be condemned to death for wholesale child-murder, but I do not grant that they will be able to evade the stern condemnation of Him who said: "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Mark, x. 14).

When the abettors of this God-defying birth-control policy are marshaling their forces and strategy from all sides, in order, as they cunningly put it, to benefit society economically, socially, and physically, it is high time and likewise imperative that all Catholics and Christian peoples should be reminded that neither science, finance nor selfishness can change, destroy, or make obsolete the God-given obligation of fulfilling the primary end of matrimony, the procreation of children.

Remember then that so-called specious excuses and sophistries, which are cited and broadcasted in favor of and in sanction of any violation of marital duties, are as pernicious and nauseating as they are diabolic and sinful. Heed not then the shibboleths which society snobs, despicable cowards, and nation-destroying fiends offer as reasons or pretexts for shirking and ignoring the God-appointed and inevitable obligations of normal married life; and ever bear in mind that once a woman becomes a wife, such a state connotes and involves the duty of procreating children.

Abide by the laws of God; hearken to the voice of conscience, and follow the dictates of duty; then your married life will be happy, pure, and holy.



## VII. The Life at Nazareth

THE earthly life of the Saviour of the world can be apportioned into three distinct phases: the hidden part, most of which was spent at Nazareth; the public life, which was taken up with His teaching, and culminated in His Passion and death; and the glorious forty days after the Resurrection, terminating in the triumphant Ascension into heaven. Strange as it must appear, the hidden part occupied an extent of nigh thirty years, out of a brief thirty-three. Notwithstanding the fact that the greatest portion of His life was passed in uneventful and humble obscurity, it still affords ample scope for meditation and interest, in that it emphasizes that aspect which is so apt to be lost sight of, if not ignored, namely the human element.

Before attempting to portray the home-life at Nazareth, it will not be amiss but rather profitable if we take a general survey of that particular district, which has become so esteemed and historical on account of the sojourn of the God-Man. In those far-off days, Palestine was made up of three provinces, Judea in the south, Samaria in the center, and Galilee in the north, and this last-named district is the one that has peculiar interest for us, as Nazareth is there. Originally Galilee came from the Hebrew word *Galil* (meaning a circle or district), and the name was applied to that locality of the Holy Land which embraced the twenty cities that were presented by Solomon to King Hiram of Tyre, "in return for his transporting timber."



The prophet Isaias has styled this province "Galilee of the Gentiles," no doubt in consequence of that part becoming the residence of a large cosmopolitan element. It was a very fertile and beautiful tract of Palestine, and nature seems ever to have been lavish with her gifts and products in that lovely clime. Josephus who spared no pains to chronicle the antiquities of the Jews, would have us believe that there were about two hundred towns in Galilee, and that many of them could boast of thousands of inhabitants; while his estimate is a challenge to good reasoning, Galilee was far more populous than Samaria or Judea. After the Babylonian captivity, the Jews multiplied very rapidly, and, as a consequence of being separated from the rest of their kinsfolk, they became imbued with the mannerisms and customs of the Syrians and Greeks who were very numerous in Galilee.

Though our blessed Lord was born at Bethlehem in Judea, still Galilee can claim with reason to be His native land, for there He spent the most of His life, there too He labored for the greater part of His three years of public life, and it was there He worked many of His miracles.

Mountain ranges extended throughout the province, rising to a height of four thousand feet in northern Galilee, and to about two thousand feet in the southern part, and it was in this latter section, where a group of hills forms a natural amphitheater, that Nazareth was situated. From the rim of this chain of hills can be seen to the southward the historic plain of Esdralon; as you look in an easterly direction you can descry the Jordan valley, and if you face the west the Mediterranean can be seen. Nazareth could be better designated as a village, and prior to its being honored by so long a period in Christ's earthly sojourn, it had



no celebrity. It is a remarkable circumstance that Nazareth, which has become so dear and so revered amongst peoples today, is not mentioned once in the Old Testament. It lies on the southern slope of a hill, and at the back of this village the rocks tower up almost perpendicularly. The name Nazareth comes from the Hebrew word "*nazar*," to shine or to flourish, and it was doubtless so styled in consequence of the lovely site of the place. Like all Jewish towns it was a mass of square white houses with terraced roofs built without style. However, the environs must have been most enchanting, so much so that St. Anthony the martyr, who lived in the sixth century, gives a most picturesque and pleasing description of the locality, and went so far as to make it comparable to paradise. Though the town had no claim to significance, still it possessed a synagogue, and it certainly could claim a very healthful climate.

The streets of this highly sacred spot of earth are very narrow, and crooked; there are vineyards on the terraced hills, while in the springtime the whole place is alive with color and brightness.

None of the remains of ancient Nazareth can now be identified, for the stone with which the houses were built was of a soft spongy type, and very soon disintegrated. That enchanted locality was the cradle of the kingdom of God, and it was also the sanctuary of the Son of God, for did He not dwell in that secluded spot for nearly thirty years? It was His native village; His home, where He grew up from infancy to childhood, from youth to manhood, and it was there in that despised village that He increased in stature and in knowledge, and likewise in favor both with God and man.

How natural then is the desire and pleasure to ac-



quaint ourselves with something of the daily life of our divine Lord during that long spell of retirement and uneventful period.

Could it be otherwise than that He Who was born in a stable would live in nothing but a humble cottage? The abode which Jesus made His home would not be unlike the present type of houses in Palestine, for their structure has not changed for centuries. In shape, it would be square, built of stone, and, as was customary in that locality, it would be so constructed that at one end it would be terminated by a cave in the side of the hill, for in those parts these grottoes were invariably turned into account by the people. Tradition tells us that formerly the house belonged to the father of our Lady, St. Joachim; and it was here that Mary was born, and here St. Joseph died. The house would have but two rooms, and around the walls, which were covered or coated with stiff white clay, there was a ledge, containing many of the household necessities.

There was just the one door, near which stood the "large common water jars of red clay." Each house had a kind of court, where was the staircase, or movable ladder, by which the roof was reached; while in a corner of the court was the baking oven. The furniture was scanty and primitive, comprising a table, a few stools, a large box for the linen, a basalt mortar for grinding the grain, and some cushions and mats, which were used for sleeping purposes.

The hearth was usually in the middle of the apartment, and as there was no chimney in our sense of the word, the place was often enough filled with smoke, which was but natural, for in the cold of winter a fire was kept burning all day. A lamp was another household necessity, and no matter how poor a Palestinian peasant might have been, he would never fail to have



a lamp burning the whole night. Finally it may be said that the house was more of a shelter than a home, for life was spent mostly out of doors. The holy house of Nazareth would be just like the home of any other poor Galilean; at all events the brilliant artistic productions of Italian painters are not the outcome of reality but of fancy.

When the Holy Family betook themselves to Nazareth it was to a life of poverty and toil, and such a monotonous round of daily occupation, with its sorrows, disappointments, joys and satisfactions, conforms better to the ideal of the ideal Child and Youth whose years we wish to recall hidden away in the solitude and insignificance of that village. As a child, we may believe that Jesus was in many respects like other children. He would share their pastimes and childish glee, and also join in their games and innocent mirth, and when they chose to wander about the fields, gathering flowers or listening to the songs of birds, He too would accompany them. Remember He was human as well as divine, hence if He did not conform to or take part in their childish interests and amusements, He could not have been regarded as having the human traits of other children.

The life at Nazareth can be summed up in a few words: He grew and obeyed. Not that there was any actual increase in those supereminent gifts which He had always possessed in the fullest measure; but that they became more and more manifest and discernible, as He grew or as circumstances demanded.

Among the Jews, education was a most sacred obligation, with the consequence that the Child was educated at home, in the synagogue and in the workshop. The domestic aspect of education was two-fold, religious and patriotic; thus the parents taught the child



to love and fear God, to be faithful to His commandments; and they did not fail to enkindle and foster in the childish mind the duty and the importance of loving His country and His race.

Once He learnt to read, the religious training began, and this consisted in reading the Scriptures, learning hymns which were the simpler psalms, and becoming familiar with the story of God's dealings with the chosen people. Everything around was teaching the Holy Child religion; the frequent visit to the synagogue, the family prayers, the celebration of the various feasts, and the other religious observances at home, and on the Sabbath.

Though the Jew paid particular attention to the religious and the intellectual side of the training, he did not neglect the worldly and the practical aspect in the child's career; thus, no matter what his rank or station he was taught some trade or other. Jesus, under the care of Joseph, followed the trade of a carpenter, and thus He grew up in the shop and in the work. The workshop in oriental climes was not in the house; the tradesmen and other business people had their stalls or displayed their wares at the bazaar; while the artisan had his bench near his dwelling. With the single exception, recorded by St. Luke, of the visit of the Child Jesus at the age of twelve to the city of Jerusalem, there are no other incidents known during all those years of toil and seclusion at Nazareth. Once Jesus attained the age of twelve, He came to a critical and responsible period of a Jewish boy's life.

At that age, by custom and by the injunction of the rabbis, He had to learn a trade; He became emancipated from parental authority; and He was then obliged to observe the prescriptions of the Law, which



demanded that He should go to Jerusalem for the great feasts of the Pasch, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles; and He was also initiated into the privileges and responsibilities of the Jewish religion.

Every year, in accordance with the religious and national code of Jewish life, the parents of Jesus attended the feast of the Passover, and now that the divine Son came under this Mosaic precept, He accompanied them on the pilgrimage to the Holy City. Though the law did not oblige women to take part in these great Feasts, still it was usual for them on these solemnities to visit the city.

On such occasions, caravans came from all the towns, villages, and the most remote parts of Palestine, and it must have been a magnificent and soul-stirring spectacle to behold those pious Israelites wending their way to Jerusalem. The vast caravan of Galilean pilgrims took about three days to accomplish their journey, which was enlivened by the sound of music and song. The feast lasted seven days, at the end of which each caravan lost no time in getting ready to make its way homeward again. The concourse of people at these solemnities was indeed huge, and was it any wonder then, that Joseph and Mary had reached Bireh, which is nigh to Bethel, where Jacob had the vision of the mysterious ladder, before they discovered that Jesus had not returned in the Nazarene caravan? His parents naturally supposed that their Son was with some of His friends or companions; and when they became aware that He had not come along with any of the other Galileans, they were beside themselves with anguish and alarm, especially when we recall that in those days the country was in a state of turmoil and sedition.

The day following, Joseph and Mary retraced their



steps to the Holy City, not without concern and self-reproach; and after three days' weary search they at length found Jesus in the Temple, seated amongst the doctors, listening to their interpretations of the Law, asking them questions, and without doubt, amazing and captivating the august assembly by the wisdom and the sincerity of His answers. Forthwith, and with that natural impulse which was the outcome of Mary's joy at finding her Son, she gently reproached Jesus, asking Him why it was that He had treated Joseph and herself in this painful manner. Then came that memorable yet mysterious answer of Jesus: "How is it that you sought me? did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?"

After thus having given evidence of His heaven-appointed mission, fulfilling His high vocation, and "though one ray from the glory of His hidden majesty had thus unmistakably flashed forth"—still in all humility, simplicity, and dutiful obedience He returned to Nazareth with Mary and Joseph and "was subject to them."

Surely, if there ever was a son who might have been expected to assert his own will, to emphasize his own authority, and claim with right his independence, it was Jesus of Nazareth; yet to sanctify, ennoble and enforce the incontrovertible duty of obedience amongst all children of Adam, He not only submitted to religious and civil authority, but, God though He was, He chose to live in entire, implicit and dutiful obedience to Mary and Joseph.

Never has the spirit of independence, self-assertiveness, and self-assurance, which is nothing else but disobedience and insubordination, made itself so audaciously and so widely felt as it is doing to-day. This spirit and trait of revolt against authority is to



be found in all grades of society, and because there are certain inalienable liberties which common sense and the good of the community recognize and demand, some malcontents have made these privileges the basis for founding and building up a system of license and lawless policies, which are defiant protestations against all law and order. Indeed is there any authority to-day, be it divine or human, at home or abroad, which is not publicly attacked, boldly ignored, and persistently disclaimed? Have we not in our midst people who boastfully avow that God and His sanction are of no significance and consequence, and who thus attempt to relegate the Divinity to something comparable to a bogey or goblin, which is useful for frightening naughty children who won't go to sleep at once, when sent to bed? Are there not other unwanted national pests and traitors, who are striving openly and secretly by their communistic, revolutionary, self-seeking and lawless creeds and schemes to undermine and shatter the pillars of the State, and who have no order or sanction, save that which a riotous man would suggest or devise?

Are there not others whose ceaseless rôle and ambition is to blast and break to countless pieces the foundations of family life by means of those expedients which are subversive of all morality and matrimonial responsibilities; by proclaiming absolute equality of woman with man; and by teaching and disseminating those false God-defying, hell-begotten views that married people are at liberty to separate and form new alliances just as fancy and circumstances may suggest?

Undoubtedly the root of all these evils is to be sought in the rebellious Lucifer-life spirit of *non serviam*, "I will not serve"; in other words it is the



natural consequence of that spirit of insubordination and disobedience which is so rampant and so nonchalantly ignored in children to-day.

It is now quite the order of the day for children and young folk to resent parental authority, and show in unmistakable fashion their aversion and disregard for that divinely-appointed supervision and control, which it is their corresponding duty to recognize and respect. Often enough parents themselves are in a certain measure culpable for this spirit of disobedience and insubordination, because they leave until too late, or ignore altogether, the momentous responsibility of training their children; a responsibility which an all-wise Providence has deemed necessary to entrust to them. A father or mother who does not inculcate and enforce obedience when a child is of tender age, is making it difficult, if not impossible, to obtain submission and respect in later years.

Many parents forget this fact; hence they laugh at little naughtinesses, they are amused by childish self-will, they overlook fits of temper, and regard as trivial any acts of insubordination, and then they are surprised, if not grieved and perturbed, when their growing sons and daughters become assertive and defiant. When there is no effort or concern to correct or reprimand wayward children, then sooner or later an account will have to be rendered for such unpardonable and far-reaching neglect.

Let parents then realize and ever remember their responsibility of bringing up their children in such a way that they will love and fear God, and respect and honor those whom God has placed over them.

If the homes of our people are to reflect the peace, joy and good will of the home at Nazareth, there must be on the part of parents an unselfish devotion to the



duties of their position; while on the part of sons and daughters there must be a readiness and desire to obey and revere parental authority. Turn then your attention to the home of Nazareth, and make that hallowed and ideal spot the ideal of every Catholic home.



## VIII. The Dawn of Man's Redemption

THE voice of the Prophet, John the Baptist, was heard in the wilderness, heralding Him who was to be the Saviour of the world; thus the hour was at hand for the God-Man to go forth and fulfill the mission of man's redemption. Before proceeding with the Gospel story, we must make a pause, and take a cursory glance at the world and society at the time of Christ. We find at that particular epoch that the then-known world was united under one scepter, for Augustus at Rome was absolute monarch and the Roman eagles reigned supreme in all lands.

When Christ came into the world, it was in truth a remarkable era. The world had been exhausted and wearied unto death by the prolonged and cruel agony of strife and wars which had at last given place to peace, which now prevailed on all sides.

The social and moral order likewise made it opportune for the advent of Him, who was to bring a message of mercy and love.

Though the earth was hushed in calm and peace, none the less there was a spirit of expectancy and excitement, and a general feeling that something most singular was about to happen; and this presentiment was not confined merely to the Jewish people.

One would have thought that such a feeling of universal agitation would have had a deep and advantageous influence upon the religious instincts of mankind, but, alas, a reign of ungodliness seemed to prevail everywhere, apart from the confines of the land which was to be honored by the birth of the Messiah.



Pagan forms of religion were in those times vague, effete, lifeless and without influence; faith in the great truths of natural religion was almost obsolete, if not dead; morality was at its lowest ebb, license and lust were even deified; while belief in a world to come was entirely out of the question.

Why! did not Julius Cæsar, who was considered an authority in matters religious, aver that "death is a rest from troubles to those in grief and misery, not a punishment; it ends all the evils of life; for there is neither care nor joy beyond it!" Under Roman dominion the only thing that mattered was the Empire and the supremacy of the Roman arms; thus it came to pass that the only worship that prevailed was the worship of brute force. Slavery was rampant, poverty was despised and scorned, the condition of woman was degrading and revolting, for she was merely the property and plaything of lustful man, while conscience was replaced by expediency.

In fine, when Rome ruled the world, and Christ came to renew the face of the earth, the State was everything, and man counted for nothing.

Strange as it may at first appear, the Roman Monarchy displayed a wonderful power in assimilating to itself the nations which it conquered, as is evidenced by their adopting her civilization, customs and characteristics. Thus we may say that they generally became completely Romanized.

But this was not the case in Palestine, for in that country the mistress of the world met with anything but peaceable conditions.

The tragedy of the exile, the discipline of their religious training, the strict adherence to laws, rites and ceremonies, their aloofness from other nations, their claim of being the chosen people of God, their country



consecrated by so many sacred associations, and their recognizing no authority save that of theocracy, all these things worked together in making the people of Palestine dislike, scorn, and when possible, not only disregard but reject Rome and her authority.

Originally, no doubt, the Jews had admired and respected the Romans, and had even entertained friendly feelings towards them, but this had now given place to an implacable and intense hatred and bitterness. Amidst all their trouble and catastrophes and subjection, they never lost sight of or gave up hope in the Messiah, who they expected would deliver them from their enemies.

The history of Israel had led them to believe that the future Deliverer would not only be a spiritual power, but that He would also play the rôle of a political head, thus exercising the double sovereignty of heavenly and earthly Kingship. The whole trend and theory of their national life inevitably linked together the secular and the religious.

Jewish politics were only Jewish religion in its public relations, for God was the political as well as religious Head of the nation.

Apart from the national and quite worldly anticipation that the Messiah would restore the splendor of the Jewish throne and establish a kingdom of matchless splendor, the religious spirit among the Jews had at the time of Christ become quite strong and active. This religious amelioration can really be dated back to the time when they returned from the captivity, and it continued to make its influence felt for some appreciable period.

The most pronounced characteristic in their religious elevation and reformation was the final disappearance of the tendency to idolatry, which had hith-



erto so frequently been the cause of their undoing and chastisement. This change for the better in matters of godly concern showed itself in various ways. The Temple became revered as the dwelling place of God, while the sacrifices, the divine service, and the solemnities of the great feasts of the Jewish calendar were all observed with due ceremonial and regularity, and great masses of the people attended these functions.

A circumstance which contributed not a little to the religious consciousness was that the Jews, in spite of the loss of independence, retained some vestige of self-government, and this authority was vested in a supreme council, known as the Sanhedrin. This legislative and administrative body exercised not only a national, but also a moral influence, which purified and refined the religious sentiment. The origin of this tribunal is sometimes attributed to Moses, who appointed seventy elders to assist him in governing the Israelites, but the Sanhedrin properly so-called only appeared towards the middle of the third century before Jesus Christ.

The President of the council was styled Nasi, and usually he was a High Priest, while the vice-president was known as Ab-Beth-Din, Father of the tribunal, because he presided in judicial cases.

The members of the Sanhedrin were representative of the three classes of the nation, namely the chief priests, the scribes or lawyers, and the ancients, who were the heads of the various families.

The duties and functions of this supreme court of authority were numerous and varied, for practically everything which pertained to Jewish life, law, ritual and tradition came under its jurisdiction.

In the course of time the Sanhedrin had become a much discredited body, and its prestige had become



greatly diminished as the outcome of the fact that it had connived at crime and grown apathetic and neglectful of its responsibility. Among the Jews there had arisen various religious sects, and these representatives of various phases of opinion combined political with religious aims and aspirations. Chief among these parties were the Pharisees, who may be described as religious and fanatic rigorists, and at the time of our Lord they were at the height of their power. The other prominent party was the Sadducees, who were aristocrats of the priestly caste. They looked down with disdain on the Pharisees who were not of noble birth, and insisted on a simpler and more lenient interpretation of the law.

It was amidst such a state of things, when the fabric of society seemed dissolving, and the new world had not yet risen from the chaos of the old, that the destined herald of a new moral order was born in the person of John, the Baptist.

Zachary and Elizabeth were well advanced in years when they were blessed with the birth of John the Baptist, which eventful circumstance had been foretold by the angel Gabriel. John's early training and surroundings were in keeping with the mission which Providence had decreed he should fulfill, and he grew up with a religious reverence for the ideal which he was to realize as the forerunner of the Messiah.

John took up his abode in a deserted and wild tract, to be alone with God and his own soul, and thus be more ideally fit to prepare for his mission.

The Gospels furnish us with some details of his appearance and mode of life. His hair was long and hung about him in a wild, disheveled fashion, his only food was the locusts which inhabited the bare hills and the honey of wild bees which he found here and



there in the clefts of the rocks, while his drink was water obtained from some rocky hollow, for springs were a rarity in those forsaken parts.

Amongst the Jews the wilderness has ever been connected with sacrosanct tradition. "From it," say the Rabbis, "came the Law, the Tabernacle, the Sanhedrin, the priesthood, and the office and the Levites. Even the kingship, and, indeed, every good gift which God granted Israel, came from the desert." John sought the wilderness in order to prepare and discipline himself for the wondrous career he was to realize as the herald of the Messiah. There, in that vast loneliness, amid the solemn stillness of seclusion, he devoted his life to the service and will of the Almighty.

He had the conviction that the coming of the long-expected Messiah was near. Desiring to ponder over and prepare himself for his mission, he realized that this could best be accomplished by giving himself up to prayer, fasting, self-denial, watching, and humiliation. Thus in the barren and rugged solitude his soul became imbued with a strong and inspired consciousness of his vocation.

Instinct with the deepest religious feeling; of a transparent simplicity, and reverent truthfulness of word and bearing; glowing with energy, a living embodiment of sincerity and self-denial, and in the best position, from his earliest years, to know the age—he was, above all men, fitted to rouse the sleeping conscience of Israel, and to lay bare the self-deceptions and sins of even the religionists of the day.

It was a time of utmost need; everywhere prevailed an earnest longing. Religion, philosophy and statecraft had all been tried and found wanting, and in this hour of despair the grand burden of John's message was announced on the Lower Jordan. The river Jor-



dan, which name signifies "the descender," rises in the Anti-Lebanon range, flows south through the marshy Lake Meron, then through the lovely Lake of Galilee to the Dead Sea, in a course of about two hundred miles if we follow its many twistings and turnings. There are no towns on its banks, which are covered with dense vegetation, and no use can be made of the river for irrigation.

It was in this region that the voice of John, which sounded like an alarm to awaken the Jews, was heard. He was no political or revolutionary agitator; he was more than a teacher, he was a herald; he was more than a leader, he was an inspiration, and he was a prophet.

With his stern denunciation, his emphatic call to repentance, and promise of pardon, he united the rite of baptism, thereby indicating that the stains of sin had to be cleansed away, and great were the crowds which flocked to him to be baptized in the waters of the Jordan. So marvelous and wide-spread was the religious excitement that a deputation came from the Pharisees and Sadducees, not to repent and confess but to scoff and criticize, and knowing their evil intent he rebuked them severely, comparing them to a brood of vipers.

To this preacher, to this baptism came in the thirtieth year of His age Jesus of Galilee, and though the Baptist shrank from performing such a rite on the Son of God, his hesitation was not allowed to prevail, and so leading Christ into the stream, he baptized Him. Suddenly the heavens opened and a vision of the Holy Ghost, descending in the "bodily shape" of a dove, lighted upon Jesus, while a heavenly voice was heard to proclaim: "Thou art My beloved Son; in Thee I am well pleased." This apparition and testimony was a



consecration from on High of the life-work of Jesus, a solemn designation from His eternal Father of His Messiahship, and likewise a confirming testimony and proclamation of His Divinity.

How long John continued his mission we do not know. However, the popularity of Christ had aroused the jealousy and indignation of some of John's disciples, which led to a dispute among the followers of each, whereupon the Baptist with true humility testified to the divine mission of Him, whose precursor he was. At any rate the work of John was now done, and so we hear nothing more of him until he reproved Herod Antipas for his lustful intrigue and adulterous concubinage with Herodias. This scandalous conduct of the royal libertine could not escape the stern condemnation of John the Baptist, with the result that the adulterous despot had his bold and troublesome censor imprisoned in a dungeon. The end of John's earthly life came on the occasion of the anniversary of the birth of Herod Antipas, when a grand feast was given to honor the event. Festivities, mirth and rejoicing ran high, during which Salome, the daughter of Herodias, danced before Antipas and the guests. Salome charmed by her dancing the revelers and so turned the head of Herod, that in his voluptuous intoxication he vowed to grant any request she might make.

At once the princely maiden slipped out of the banquet hall and acquainted her mother Herodias of the wondrous promise of the lustful degenerate. Herodias, seeing her opportunity to get revenge for the fierce denunciation which she had suffered from John for her dissolute life, bade her daughter to ask for his head.

Her bloody request shocked even Herod, yet he had



not the courage to refuse; hence orders were instantly given for the execution of the prophèt. Presently the head was carried in on a silver salver, and presented to Salome, who forthwith took it as a gruesome gift to her mother.

Thus did the brave precursor and prophet pass into the beyond, there to wait and watch for his Lord, who two years later came straight from the Cross, bringing the message of Redemption to those who dwelt in the land of the just, and then did the Baptist meet again "the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world."

John the Baptist, prophet, precursor of the Messiah and martyr, had done his important work for his Lord and Master, braving all opposition, censure, and condemnation, facing the terrors and the solitude of the desert, and meeting with equanimity and resignation every hardship and obstacle in the faithful discharge of his divinely-appointed commission.

His duty and ambition was to preach the truth, to present the ideal of spiritual perfection, to wean his hearers from sin and error, to rebuke wickedness, to scorn persecution, to reinforce the tides of godliness, and to lead his penitents along the path of righteousness. The achievement of this high ideal demanded indomitable and unique courage.

What, to him, was a scowling Pharisee, or a mocking Sadducee, or a fawning publican, or a rough soldier, or a riotous mob?

The noble and heroic manliness and courage of the Baptist, as displayed in his life's work, will best exemplify to us the sort of disposition that is well suited to us, who rejoice and boast in the name of Christian. Is there any one who does not detest and despise the coward? Yet how often, when called upon to profess



and champion the cause of religion, do we become the victims of cowardice!

When we conform to the ways of the world, the ideas of the worldly, and to the dictates and vagaries of fashion, at once we effect a compromise, in other words, we become cowards. When we violate or ignore any of God's commands, or heed not the dictates of conscience or the rulings of the Church, at once we stand condemned as cowards.

If, when the devil assaults us with thoughts of pride and rebellion we yield and make no resistance; if, when the world and its fleeting enticements allure us from the path of duty into the byways of dissipation and pleasure-seeking; then indeed we are acting the rôle of a coward.

Why do our newspapers teem with the details of vice and crime; why is it that religion is the butt of sneers, ridicule and reproach; why is it that moral uprightness is branded as effeminacy; why is it that the men are so reluctant in approaching the altar rails; why is that the gambler, the drunkard, and the libertine go to such extremes; why is it that the devotees of Dame Fashion appear in finery and modes which set at defiance all propriety and good taste; and why has social gain and distinction overridden all the claims of the religious sense, why?—because our self-centered, self-seeking, and self-satisfied so-called Christians have not got the grit and the manliness to stand up for what is right, just and reasonable!

To speak contemptuously of fallen brethren, to appear amazed if not shocked at the misdemeanors of those whose offenses are aired in our police courts, and to be horrified at the increase of crime and lawlessness, is not a very laborious matter, or one that demands any courageous effort.



But when we can stand undaunted in the cause of righteousness and of the oppressed and down-trodden; in spite of sneers and adverse public opinion; when we can be firm and fearless with the mighty as well as with the menial; when we can face opposition and humiliation and yet be steadfast in matters of moment, then there is courage in us.

This was the test to which John the Baptist was submitted. Let us then strive to imitate him, and be unconcerned about consequences so long as we are fighting the good fight. Our glorious reward was announced by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself when He said: "Every one therefore that shall confess me before men, I will also confess him before My Father Who is in Heaven."



## IX. The Conflict of Christ with the Tempter

THIRTY years of retirement and obscurity had now drawn to a close, and a marked change took place; for we find our divine Lord going to John to be baptized in the Jordan, which solemn rite, with its mysterious accompaniments of the visible descent of the Holy Ghost, and the Father's attestation to the Son's Divinity, characterize His public initiation into the eternally decreed mission of the Messiahship.

Hitherto unknown and to all public appearances not intent upon any important mission of consequence; henceforth He was to be about His Father's business.

From this hour onwards He had to confront the kingdom of this world, in order to confound its dominion and construct on its ruins the kingdom of heaven.

This unique and God-devised task entailed untiring zeal, indomitable courage and indefatigable perseverance, for He had to face and withstand the power of darkness and its wily emissaries, He would be subjected to the hatred, sneers and hostility of men, the timidity, distrust, and desertion of His disciples; and would suffer misconception, misrepresentation, persecution, and eventually death—the death of one who was in the eyes of many of the people a misguided, unsuccessful and fanatical impostor.

In immediate preparation for His stupendous task our Lord sought the solitude of the desert, where away from the haunts of men He could hold sacred communion with His heavenly Father and prepare and fit Him-



self for the mighty task of preaching the kingdom of God, of redeeming fallen man from the prince of perdition, and of establishing His Church for the perpetuation of His work.

In retirement He would survey with calmness and clarity the work He had come to do; there in seclusion He would acquire refreshment and strength to equip Himself for His mission, then after a sojourn of forty days spent in recollection, prayer and fasting, He would go forth to accomplish the designs of His heavenly Father.

The exact spot in the wilderness to which our Lord retired is not assigned by any of the evangelists, but ancient tradition has indicated a most barren mountain where is presented a picture of nature bereft of all life. It is called "Quarantania," which means "the place of the Forty Days," and it is the roughest and most desolate of all the deserts of Palestine. The mountain is sometimes known as the "Mount of Temptation." It has a most dreary and arid appearance, and on all sides it is honeycombed with various caves, which have been the haunts of the hermits and anchorites who sojourned there in order to seek spiritual consolation and divine inspiration. From the top of this a most amazing if not dazzling panorama can be secured.

Far away to the south, lies the Dead Sea, "in its mysterious sepulchre," above which Mt. Quarantania rises to a height of about two thousand five hundred feet.

The Dead Sea owes its name to a former prevalent impression, that nothing could live in its bitter and nauseous waters.

Often enough it is called the Salt Sea, and it is the largest of the three lakes of which Palestine can boast; and into its salt depths the Jordan empties itself.



Looking in a northerly direction from the top of Mt. Quarantania, the snow-tipped Hermon, the scene of the Transfiguration, can be descried, towering aloft, its sandy ridges covered with a large growth of pines. The dark mountains of Moab and Edom bound the eastern horizon, having the wide Jordan valley at their feet and the heights of Nebo above; while on the west is the desert-land of Juda, on whose innumerable hills the winter rains raise a little grass, to be parched by the first summer sun. This wide area of mountain, plain and sea is crowded with ancient sites whose names recall some of the grandest episodes in biblical history.

Though we are not sure of the exact spot to which our Divine Lord betook Himself for the forty days' fast, still no place could have better suited His purpose than the traditional site of Mt. Quarantania with its lonely and barren surroundings.

The wilderness with its sacred quiet and seclusion was an ideal place for retirement and recollection, for there, in that desert solitude, Christ could finally prepare and equip Himself for the task of His important mission which was now about to be undertaken. In this vast and forsaken abode of prayer and meditation, Christ tarried for forty days, in intense concentration of soul on the great work before Him.

The number Forty occurs again and again in Sacred Scripture; thus the deluge fell for forty days, the children of Israel lingered in the desert forty years, prior to their entrance into the Promised Land; it was forty days that Moses sojourned on Mt. Sinai, and that Elias wandered in the wilderness to escape the wrath of a wicked queen; while Jesus was presented in the Temple after the same period of time, and the same time elapsed from the Resurrection to His Ascension.

Those days which Christ passed in the solitude of



the desert, must have been spent in ecstatic contemplation, and they must have been one long period of moral and spiritual tension, for "he ate nothing in those days," which would scarcely have been possible under ordinary circumstances. "And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He was afterwards hungry," thereby evincing the reality of His human nature, which was now permitted to feel the intense craving for nourishment. The long fast of Jesus encouraged the Evil One to attempt to overcome and overthrow the All-Holy One.

To let Satan do his worst was a fitting if not needful preliminary to the pending destruction and overthrow of his kingdom. Since Christ was human as well as divine, it was meet and certainly of serious import to mankind that the Anointed of God should give us a sublime example of meeting temptation. Since the human nature of Jesus was free from all concupiscence, He could be tempted only from without.

If we take St. Mark's or St. Luke's account of the temptation, it would seem that it was concomitant with the forty days' fast, but the more probable opinion favors the contention that it did not occur until the expiration of that period.

In the district of Quarantania the ground is strewn with round flat stones which in form were similar to the shape of the loaves then in use among the Jews; and presenting some of these to the famished Christ, the devil said: "If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." No temptation is more pressing and difficult to resist than the prompting to do what seems needful for self-preservation, when abundant means are at hand. But Jesus did not lose trust in His Father who had brought Him hither, and Who would give Him what He needed, when



He chose. The miraculous gift with which Christ was endowed was not for His own use or advantage, but for the glory of His Father and the benefit of mankind, not for His own convenience but as a spiritual aid in His Messianic mission. The subtlety of the temptation lay in the call to exercise His supernatural powers when the will of His Father did not demand it. The answer of our Lord: "It is written: not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God," manifested in a wonderful manner His divine wisdom, for He thereby balked the tempter, at once answering and refuting him without disclosing His identity, which the devil was most anxious to ascertain.

By trust in His Father the Son of God came forth triumphant in the first encounter with the Evil One. Recognizing that his divine victim had such implicit and strong faith in the will of God, this at once suggested to Satan a fresh expedient whereby he could apply his subtlety with even greater skill. Accordingly he asked the Son of God to show His Faith by casting Himself from the pinnacle of the Temple, whither he had taken Him, at the same time assuring our divine Lord that the angelic host would see that no harm came to Him.

How are we to interpret Satan's action in taking Christ to one of the lofty pinnacles, or perhaps to the tower at the southeastern angle of the Temple cloisters, where the Royal Porch and Solomon's Porch met, and whence the view into the Kedron Valley beneath was to the stupendous depth of four hundred and fifty feet? When we are reminded that Christ allowed Himself to be put to death by the minions of Satan, it is not surprising that He allowed Himself to be carried by him to the pinnacle of the Temple.



This particular temptation was to make the Son of God commit Himself by an act of presumption, and at the same time inaugurate His Messiahship by a vindication of His powers and authority, and thus flatter His own self-love. No place was better fitted for such sensational declaration of His Messianic Kingdom, and no spot was more suitable for securing the rapturous acclamation and the enthusiastic following of the people as Jerusalem. This must have appealed to Him for a moment, otherwise it could not have been a temptation, but at once He makes the right choice and Satan is again foiled; for Jesus said: "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Then came the final temptation in the solitude of the desert, for tradition assigns the mountain to which the devil took our Lord as Mt. Quarantania, from which heights there is visible a magnificent panorama.

He had withdrawn into the wilderness to prepare for His heaven-sent mission, and while His mind was absorbed with the one idea of His mysterious consecration as the Anointed One of God, Satan insinuated the thought of how He was best to accomplish the establishment of the Messianic kingdom. Before Him lay most contrasting alternatives.

Unique enterprises demanded unique means. On the one hand, there was the weary road of shame, disappointment, humiliation, opposition, suffering, persecution, the Cross, and seeming failure.

On the other hand, the path led to honor supreme, success unparalleled, glory unrivaled, triumph unprecedented, and dominion world-wide.

Such was the choice, and in order to accomplish his crafty and wicked designs, Satan presented to our Lord's gaze a most dazzling and tempting vision of the wonders and the allurements of the world, all of



which the tempter promised to give to the Son of God, provided He would but adore him.

The Powers of Darkness tempted in vain, and failed hopelessly, whereupon angels came and ministered to the Son of God.

The example of our blessed Lord, as set forth and emphasized by His retiring into the quiet and solitude of the desert, is of high and individual importance to us in this age of unceasing pressure and bustle.

A time of retirement from our daily avocations and duties is necessary for all, for without it there cannot be thorough and efficacious work in the business of salvation.

In practically every branch of life, in every employment, and in every profession, man is apt to, and more often than not does, value the worldly benefit of work done, and not the God-appointed purpose of it; hence he has no patience and no desire to devote much time or energy to the great spiritual work and needs of his soul. Although we are in the world—for our work, our probation and perils lie there—the fear is, that in consequence of these encumbrances, we may forget the one thing necessary. We need then seasons of retirement to restore the balance of things, and so put the claims and demands of Heaven in their right place. How stands your account, and how stands mine with God, and a future world and an unknown eternity? These are questions not to be worked out in a crowd, in the din and turmoil of the world, in the busy plodding of a work-a-day life, in the keen strife of competition and almost inevitable rivalries; no, they demand retirement, a going apart from the world and its attractions and distractions to a time of enforced reflection and self-examination. Time is needed for soul soliloquy, so that it can rehearse to itself what shall



be the manner of its appearing before God, and what it shall say. If we do not use such reflection, we shall never thoroughly recognize and estimate the worth of salvation; the still small voice of conscience cannot be heard amidst the din of the world. We are again and again told in the Sacred Records how our divine Lord, even in the most laborious of His public engagements, often sought retirement?

But, brethren, be our occupations what they may, be we those on whom devolve the burdens and the trials of life, or be we of those who voluntarily dedicate our spare time to good and godly works, it matters not; the necessity is one that not only prompts but dictates that we withdraw from the world of action to the sanctuary of repose and self-communication. We have much to speak to our hearts about, once we have retired into the solitude and quiet of some peaceful abode of our Eucharistic God.

There should be a keen remembrance that God is ever present with us, speaking to us, directing our attention to the many and varied aspects of His wonderful Providence, quickening and directing conscience to renewed activities, and making us alive to the momentous work of our eternal welfare.

Amidst such retirement we can protest our gratitude for mercies vouchsafed, for privileges great and numerous, for our deliverances from sin and its dangerous occasions, and for trials encountered and merit gained and stored in the house of eternity. Again we should commune with our own heart about its besetting sin, and ascertain whether our self-scrutiny which we make from time to time is exacting and impartial.

The great question for each one of us to decide is—are we Christ's? Prove your own work, let your soul be weighed in the true and just balance, apply the prin-



ciples of your religious faith and practice to your inner and outer life. To be Christ's, there must be delight in His service, a desire and an endeavor to gain His friendship and good-will, a repose and a refreshment in His work of atonement, a visible imitation of His ideal and life, and a determination to battle until the burden of life is laid down in the final crisis, after which an eternity of heavenly delight will be the fitting recompense for duty conscientiously attempted and duty faithfully done.



## X. The Marriage at Cana

THROUGHOUT His missionary career, Christ the Son of God claimed, and insisted in an unmistakable fashion on His Divinity, and to convince one and all of this claim, He had recourse to such testimony as would leave His claim indisputable. To establish this divine contention He cited the unimpeachable testimony of His heavenly Father; He made predictions about Himself and others, which were fulfilled in every detail; He exercised frequently a most striking wonder-working power and He became the realization of all Messianic prophecies. For a moment, let us recall the evidence of miraculous control over the physical world.

Briefly stated, a miracle is an event so wonderful that it is beyond the power of finite nature, hence it requires some intervention which is beyond the natural order, and this intervention can be none other than that of God. When our blessed Lord chose to exercise His authority and influence over the forces of nature, He did not summon to His aid the resources of art, human ingenuity, and mechanical devices, but merely consulted His own will and sovereign power, and then what He wished was effected. At Cana, He changed the substance of water into the substance of wine; on the shores of Lake Tiberias He multiplied the five loaves, and thus fed some five thousand people; He commanded the winds to be still; He cured the centurion's servant at Capharnaum; He raised Lazarus to life; all of which attest His absolute power over the laws of nature. Since then, wine and bread, the elements and



the sea, sickness, health, life and death were obedient to the will of Christ, it obviously follows that His power was unlimited, that is to say, divine, for God alone controls the world with a power which knows no limits and no obstacles.

His works not only attest and confirm His divine mission but at the same time they prove it beyond contention. His action was the action of God; therefore He was God. During His public life, Christ wrought innumerable miracles, many of which are recorded by the Evangelists, yet none could more fitly inaugurate the whole future work of the Son of God, and form a better introduction to the other miracles, than "this beginning of miracles" which "Jesus did in Cana of Galilee," and which is familiarly known as the changing of water into wine.

Once the tension of the forty days' fast and conflict with the devil was over, our divine Lord entered into ordinary if not daily intercourse with His countrymen, for a week later we find Him taking a prominent part in the wedding festivities at Cana. We are indebted to St. John for the record of this auspicious, yet after all, everyday happening, as the other Evangelists refrain from noting any incident between the Temptation in the wilderness and the Public Ministry in Galilee.

Strangely enough, the exact site of the little town of Cana cannot with any certainty be fixed, but if we accept the most probable or traditional verdict, it must be identified with the modern little village of *Kefr Kenna*, which is about five miles northeast of Nazareth, and on the road to the Sea of Galilee. The district is hilly and most fertile, as the soil is of a very moist nature. The name Cana signifies "the reedy place" but to-day the neighborhood is so wild and desolate



that it has become the favorite haunt of leopards, wild boar, and jackals.

One visitor writing of this deserted spot, gives us a vivid picture of the desolation. "I met," he tells us, "not a living soul; not even a dog; the watchman one never misses in Palestine was not there to give a sound. My step echoed through the deserted little street, and open square, as if in the dead of night. . . ."

In the days when Jesus came to Cana it was a different place altogether.

On the evening that He arrived, along with His disciples, the place was alive with excitement and bustle, for there was to be a marriage. Among the invited guests were Jesus, His Blessed Mother, and some of the disciples. The names of the happy couple are not mentioned, but it is not unreasonable to suppose that they were friends of Our Lady, for her concern and anxiety about the marriage arrangements would suggest some tie of intimacy.

How long precisely the marriage festival lasted, or at what precise stage of the rejoicings the wine ran out, we cannot say, for St. John merely adds that "the wine failing, the mother of Jesus saith to Him: They have no wine." Perhaps the poverty of the hosts, or an unexpectedly large number of the guests, accounted for the fact that enough wine had not been provided. In those Eastern parts hospitality on a lavish scale was regarded as a very sacred duty, hence picture the gloom, the distress, the shame, if not the disgrace, which would have fallen on the household if they had had to acquaint the guests that there was no wine.

Once she was aware of the unpleasant and disquieting situation, the mother of Jesus mentioned



to her divine Son that the supply of wine had failed. He, knowing that she was anxious that the situation should be righted, said gently to her: "Woman, what is it to me and to thee?" This answer of our blessed Lord has given cavillers, bigots and critics ample scope for discussion, but the context affords no ground for the idea that it was intended as a rebuke.

The word "Woman" which to us sounds harsh, disrespectful and repellent, was an ordinary form of address; indeed personages of the highest rank and title were accustomed to be greeted in this fashion, and so courteous was its use that it was addressed at the tenderest moments to the most fondly loved. In further evidence that there was no lack of respect or affection, we must remember that when He was dying on the Cross, He used again the self-same term, "Woman, behold thy Son," and it was in a similar fashion that He spoke to the weeping Magdalen after His Resurrection, "Jesus saith to her: Woman, why weepest thou?"

At all events, His further attitude and demeanor should dispel all idea of reproach or pained feelings, for no sooner had her dear Son made His reply, than, at once, with faith unshaken, she bade the servants to do whatsoever He commanded.

In every household necessary provision was made for the various ceremonial purifications or numerous ablutions which the Jewish Law prescribed, so we need not be surprised to find that on this occasion there were six large water jars standing near the entrance of the house, or in the chamber itself.

Jesus gave orders to the servants that they should "fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim." Then He asked the waiters "to



draw" from the water jars some of the contents in smaller vessels, and bade them take the liquid to the chief steward of the feast.

Now the chief steward was not at all aware that the wine had failed, hence on tasting the fresh supply, he was agreeably surprised to find it was so good, and in his gratification he playfully twitted the bridegroom for reserving the best wine of all until the end.

Here, then, as St. John assures us, was the beginning of the many miracles which Jesus wrought for the benefit of humanity, thereby manifesting His divine power and glory, and it is well that we should realize this miraculous influence and intervention, for nowadays it is not only overlooked and denied but vigorously attacked and denied.

The Gospel record of the marriage at Cana is a simple and beautiful story, and it is precisely because of its simplicity and beauty that we get a further insight into the life story of Jesus.

After all, a wedding was an everyday occurrence, and as far as the world was concerned it was but a trivial event, but Jesus was invited, and what is more emphatically significant and worthy of note, is the fact that He accepted the invitation, and graced the occasion with His Divine presence. But now let us make some endeavor to grasp and to take to heart the spiritual significance of this familiar Gospel story. It does not seem at all unreasonable to infer that Christ was present at this marriage ceremonial in order to give at the very outset of His ministry a special blessing and divine approval to that natural contract between man and woman, which eventually He raised to the hallowed dignity of a Sacrament, and which was an indissoluble union until the death of one of the contracting parties.



If Christ were invited to every marriage, and the parties concerned could be made to realize and value the Christlike influence which should permeate the minds and behavior of all people contemplating marriage, then, please God, there would be fewer luckless marriages in the land to-day.

The modern spirit of independence and the Godless propaganda, which are so rife, are boldly attempting to intrude upon the holy precincts of the God-made contract of matrimony, and if these diabolic agencies are allowed to go unheeded and unchecked, then the world will eventually become a Turkish harem or a great Salt Lake City. The many and so easily secured divorces are bringing unhappiness, strife and ruin to the homes of the people—those homes which should be the source and strength of the country's welfare—and at the same time this infernal divorce machine is grinding the nation to dust.

When the powers of State would have us believe that they are competent and justified in tampering with and setting at naught the marriage bonds, they should produce their credentials for so acting, and until they do, they must be regarded as unrightfully violating the sacredness of the family. The very fact that the family is, in its origin, prior to the State is an irrefragable argument that the essential constitution of the family is independent of the State. A higher power has called the family into being, has made it what it is, and that power alone can modify, change or unmake it.

Apart from the fact that divorce legislation results eventually in the destruction of the home and the ruin of the nation—if you doubt this, read the history of Rome and Greece—it brings in its train the revolting degradation of woman, reducing her to the state of a



convenience, chattel, toy and slave of lustful man, and making her comparable to the inmate of a harem.

Unfortunately this is not the whole story of woe; indeed one of the saddest features and consequences of this divorce evil is the affliction, shame and misery it metes out to the unfortunate and unoffending offspring. Numbers of these hapless children are consigned to orphanages, others sooner or later are to be found in Reformatory Schools, whilst not a few simply get adrift and help to swell the ranks of waifs and strays, tramps and criminals, and place an additional burden on the financial resources of the community.

It is sometimes said by Catholics that the divorce measures do not trouble or concern them, as they do not recognize or believe in such legislation. Such an attitude is selfish to a degree, and dangerously compromising. Those who adopt these sentiments are impeding and imperiling the conversion of non-Catholics, for divorce and subsequent marriage is an overpowering and almost insurmountable obstacle to conversion. In any case, these non-Catholics are our fellow countrymen, and it is our duty, as well as theirs, to stem and drive back the tide of lust and licensed immorality, to save the country from disintegration and downfall, and to avert the destruction and the ruin of the family. Furthermore, Catholics cannot remain entirely unaffected by these easy divorce measures, for even Catholics are affected by the selfish, materialistic and ungodly atmosphere and environment in which they live, and how can they breathe a divorce-ridden atmosphere, and not be infected?

Those responsible for divorce facilities are not acting in accordance with the decrees of God and His Church, but in opposition to such divine Authority,



hence their so-styled legal enactments are to be branded as ungodly and irreligious. The bond of a consummated marriage can never be dissolved but by death; therefore any unblushing, man-made measures which attempt to legalize and sanction divorce, are nothing else but paganism pure and simple, and a punishable violation of that solemn and irrevocable command which says: "What God hath joined, let no man put asunder!"



## XI. The Vindication of Christ and His Mission

WE now come to that particular period in our blessed Saviour's public ministry, which marks a turning point in His plan of campaign, and this was occasioned by a miracle which He worked at Jerusalem.

Up to this episode, Christ had designedly avoided anything which might excite public admiration and acclamation, or provoke the prejudice and enmity of the ruling powers. Undoubtedly He was recognized as a wonder-worker, reformer, and a religious enthusiast, while not a few of the people revered Him as a prophet, and thus His influence was spreading far and wide; yet even so, a certain amount of reserve had so far characterized His public activities. However, the time had now arrived, when perforce He had to reveal Himself, declare His Messianic identity, explain His mission, and vindicate His position.

Simultaneously with this momentous step, there began a definite hostility on the part of His adversaries which pursued Him till the end.

In other words, henceforth He was a marked man, from that hour onwards Calvary loomed in the distance, for His doom was fixed.

For some time past, our divine Lord had been in Galilee on missionary labors, after which He proceeded to Jerusalem, "for there was a festival of the Jews." Now one thing which would have arrested the atten-



tion of any wayfarer approaching the Holy City from a north-easterly direction would be its beauty and splendor.

Jerusalem was essentially a city of palaces, and as they were all of regal luxury and magnificence, their sight naturally conveyed an impression of grace and charm. It was the chief city of Palestine, was built upon the crest of a chain of hills, and was probably about double the area of the modern Jerusalem. Originally it was styled Salem, meaning "Peace," but according to Assyrian inscriptions, which date back to 1400 B.C. it was known as "U-ru-sa-lim," that is the city of peace."

Its population was computed at about two hundred odd thousands, and of course at the times of the great festivals there was a great influx of travelers, which naturally swelled the normal figures.

The main center of attraction and interest was the Temple which stood in a commanding position on Mt. Moriah.

It was a magnificent architectural triumph, which rose on the south and east from massive stone foundations and, with its gilded central buildings, its large fore-courts, extensive and beautiful wings and intervening erections, its splendid colonnades, mighty outer walls and fortress towers, presented the aspect at once of a wonderful temple and an invincible stronghold. The Temple was not one large building like our cathedrals, but rather a succession of enclosures and buildings one within the other. Descending from the Temple into the city, one found in the narrow noisy streets many shops and bazaars; then there were also movable wooden booths, at which sellers and bargaining buyers were busily trafficking.

If one left this busy scene and repaired to the resi-



dential quarters, known as the Upper City, one found the same narrow streets, but tenanted by the more select and aristocratic portion of the community. Strange as it must seem, Jerusalem had its underground thoroughfares, which burrowed under the city, under the Upper City, under the Temple, beyond the walls, and they were somewhat extensive, as may be gathered from the circumstance that, after the capture of the city, besides the living who had sought shelter there, no fewer than two thousand dead bodies were found in those subterranean streets.

During the early spring of the second year of His ministry, Jesus came to Jerusalem, for "there was a festival of the Jews." What precise feast it was, we have no means of deciding, but the early Fathers do not hesitate to allege that it was the Pass-over. After making reference to the feast, whatever it may have been, the Evangelist goes on to inform us that there was in the Holy City, by the sheep market, a pool called in the Hebrew tongue *Bethesda*, surrounded by five porches. The word *Bethesda* denotes, "the house of mercy," and the porches appear to have been covered halls, occupied by a great gathering of sick folk, of blind, paralytics, who had been brought there by their friends in the heart-felt hope and earnest expectation of obtaining a cure through the virtues of the waters.

The Pool of Bethesda had gained great repute in consequence of its curative powers, which became effective when "an angel of the Lord descended at certain times into the pond; and the water was moved."

Whenever this angelic intervention occurred, it so happened that the first diseased person who stepped into the pool after the motion of the water, was instantly healed of whatever disease he had.



St. John gives no further details, leaving us entirely in the dark as to whether the miraculous powers of the water were of recent origin, or whether they dated back to days of long ago.

At all events, a popular fancy had, indeed, created a complicated legend to account for the wonder, and whatever explanation was proffered or suggested, this much is certain, namely that it was a rendezvous for all those who were suffering from various ordinarily incurable diseases and complaints. As was mentioned previously, there were five porches around the pool, and these afforded a suitable shelter for the unfortunate patients, and these porches, as well as the steps leading down to the water, were crowded every day. One Sabbath, as Jesus was passing by the pool, He came across a poor cripple who, for thirty-eight years, had been regularly brought to the spot at the time when the angel was expected to agitate the waters; but the healing virtue of the waters only took effect in the case of the first person to step into the pool, and, as we may well imagine, amongst so many eager contestants this unfortunate, helpless cripple had failed to make a timely entry.

Every year must have diminished his chances of a cure, especially when we find he had no friend to assist him; still he would not desert the porches of Bethesda, nor give up hope, and eventually he was rewarded for his patience, and recompensed in a manner most unexpected and wholly unprecedented. His pitiful plight attracted the notice of the compassionate Jesus, who, after hearing the history of his sad experiences, then and there bade him arise, take up his bed, and walk; and the fortunate man finding himself able to obey, rose, picked up his bed, which would be a mat, and departed to his own house.



Now this cure took place on the Sabbath, and as no other feature of the Jewish religious system was so strictly observed as its singular and rigorous exactitude in the outward observance of the Sabbath, Christ had apparently violated in a most flagrant fashion one of the most respected ordinances.

“But on the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: thou shalt not work on it, thou nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy beast, nor the stranger that is within thy gates” (Exodus, xx. 10). Without entering too minutely into the strict regulations set forth by the Rabbis on the question of Sabbath sanctification, let us recall some of the items.

Precautionary measures dealt with the close of work on the Friday, thus nothing new was to be begun in the form of business or occupation in the afternoon of that day. A complicated schedule of rules was prescribed regarding food, drink, dress, the use or removal of furniture, purchasing articles, and other punctilious details.

To light or extinguish a fire on the Sabbath, to write two letters, to tie or loose certain kinds of knots, to give an emetic, to set a bone, to perform any medical or surgical operation, for women to look in the glass, or wear a wig in the street, to go about with false teeth, to pluck a mushroom or a blade of grass, were all forbidden, and any infringement of these rigorous precepts was sinful. However it was permissible to borrow wine, bread, and oil on the Sabbath, and to leave one's upper garment in pledge, though one should not express it in such a manner as to imply it was a loan. A person might bathe in curative waters, but he was not allowed to carry away even the towel he had used.



Now when the Jews saw the poor paralytic walking along with his bed rolled up, he was of course transgressing the Sabbath regulations, and he was promptly called to order. Quite naturally he surmised, and instinctively persuaded himself, that He who had the power to work such a wondrous cure, was likewise invested with authority to bid him take up his bed and walk.

Then again the sudden cure would so amaze and enrapture the man, that in his transport of happiness and wonder he would become totally oblivious of the rigors of the Sabbath Laws. Why! he did not even recollect who it was that had healed him, so evidently he could not be made altogether responsible for his unlawful behavior.

However, though he could not satisfy the inquirers as to the identity of Him who had effected the miraculous cure, he did not fail to excuse himself for his Sabbath transgression by stating that the same person bade him pick up his pallet and walk. Of course the Jewish intriguers were less concerned about the man's story of his recovery of health, than at the scandalous and wicked command to "take up thy bed and walk." This violation of the Sabbath was a welcome occasion for the enemies of our Lord to call Him to task for the fancied sinful act, and thus to defame Him in the eyes of those who were in admiration of Him. Some time later, Jesus came across the cured paralytic in the Temple and He warned him saying, "Behold thou art made whole; sin no more, lest some worse thing should happen to thee." Actuated no doubt by gratitude and good will towards his benefactor, he went off and published everywhere that it was "Jesus that had made him whole." The Jewish fanatics now became intent on one thing alone, namely to fasten such accu-



sation on the God-Man as would hasten and procure His punishment by death, and they never faltered in their diabolic resolve and hellish plot.

The Jews, and especially the scribes and the Pharisees, not only accused Jesus of having healed the man on the Sabbath, but of having likewise authorized him to violate the strict ordinances of such a sacrosanct day. To His self-appointed Judges, Jesus answered: "My Father worketh until now: and I work"; thereby implying, and wishing His adversaries to understand, that He was consubstantial with and equal to the Father, or in other words, that He was God, and not merely man.

The reply of our divine Lord was meant to expose the ignorance, the materialism and narrow-mindedness of His malicious critics, by pointing out in unmistakable language that, as His Father was conserving and governing all things, so He, since He was of the same nature and equal to the Father, was justified in acting as God.

What the Father willed, He willed: what His Father did, He did: as no human authority can weaken the authority of God, so none can weaken His authority: His right of action is equal to that of God.

The answer of Christ plainly affirmed His Divinity, made it patent that He was the Messiah, and set forth His Messianic mission.

The Jewish tribunal now realized that He had not only violated the Sabbath discipline, but had gone to an unheard-of extreme in claiming to be equal to God, and at once their exasperation reached a high pitch, not so much at the Sabbath desecration, but at what they termed the unpardonable and outrageous crime of blasphemy. Christ saw that they had grasped the precise purport of His words, and then He proceeded



to state in detail why He had spoken in such an unequivocal fashion.

The momentous avowal of His Godhead, of His Messianic character and mission, and His reference to His heavenly Father and His Father's business, made the Jews readily recognize His claim to Divinity. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, then and there, endeavored to justify His claim before His scheming intriguers, who, as events showed, were neither prepared nor willing to accept His contention.

However, He entered upon a lengthy discourse, in which He repeated and re-emphasized His claim to Divinity, and proved it by various arguments.

He re-affirmed at the outset that He could not possibly act independently of His Father, and He forthwith proceeded to particularize the stupendous work which the Father would give Him to perform in reference to the raising of the dead to life. The first was the spiritual resurrection, in which a soul would be raised from the death of sin to the life of grace; the second pertained to the raising of the dead to life, as was instanced in the persons of the young man at Naim and of Lazarus; while the third work was the general resurrection and judgment at the end of the world, which was even more wonderful.

Following this emphatic justification of His powers, He then went on to vindicate His mission, which formed the chief item of the dispute with His cavillers. Obviously, if the absolute certainty of His mission from God was once manifestly established and clearly understood, perforce He would at once be recognized and respected as the long-desired Messiah, the Redeemer of fallen man.

In order to substantiate and make acceptable His momentous claim He cited the testimony of His



Father, that of John the Baptist, of the Scriptures in general, and lastly the testimony of Moses.

“You sent to John: and He gave testimony to the truth . . . But I have a greater testimony than that of John. For the works which the Father hath given Me to perfect, the works themselves which I do, give testimony of Me, that the Father hath sent Me. . . . Search the Scriptures: for you think in them to have life everlasting: and the same are they that give testimony of Me. . . . I am come in the name of My Father; and you receive Me not. . . . There is one that accuseth you. Moses, in whom you trust. For if you did believe Moses, you would, perhaps, believe Me also: for he wrote of Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?” (John v. 33-47). Never before had the Son of God spoken so plainly and so forcibly, but still this testimony, though clear and incontestable, was not sufficient or rather was not acceptable to His fanatical persecutors, who only hated Him the more for what He had said.

Now, my Brethren, belief in the Divinity of Jesus Christ is the bed-rock of our Faith, the corner-stone of our dogmatic edifice, and the pledge of our eternal salvation. In this age of controversy and criticism, of newfangled notions and self-made theories, and of conceit and intellectual riot, it is vital that we should realize and treasure the essential import of the great question: “What think you of Christ?”

To go exhaustively into the many and positive evidences of the Divinity of Christ would take a great deal more time than we have now at our disposal. Nevertheless it is important that we recall to memory some of the most important proofs, because our Faith and our Religion are based on the Divinity of Christ and it behooves us to know and to remember that our be-



lief in His Divinity is based upon the most conclusive and unimpeachable evidence.

Let us rehearse then briefly the most important and convincing points of this evidence.

First there is the Messianic character of Christ, showing how the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament are fulfilled in Him.

The promised Redeemer is our Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God. The name Jesus means Saviour or Redeemer and indicates our Lord's mission. The Greek name Christus, in Hebrew Mashiach or Messiah, means "anointed." Under the Old Dispensation prophets, priests, and kings were anointed with oil when entering upon their exalted offices, and were called "The Lord's anointed." Jesus is most particularly the anointed, since, being the promised Messiah, He is at once our supreme prophet, priest, and king (Acts iii, 22; Hebr. iv, 14; John xviii, 37).

1. Jesus is our *prophet*, because He revealed to us the mysteries of God and taught us what to do in order to be saved.

2. Jesus is our *priest*, because He sacrificed Himself for us on the Cross and still daily offers Himself upon our altars; moreover He will be for ever our mediator and advocate in heaven.

3. Jesus is our *king*, because He founded the Church, a spiritual kingdom, of which He is the supreme Head.

Jesus is called the only-begotten Son of God, because He, being the Second Person of the most holy Trinity, is the one, true Son of God, being of one nature and one essence with God the Father.

Jesus Christ is called our Lord:



1. As God, being one with the Father, and like Him Lord of heaven and earth.

2. As Man, because in His human nature He redeemed us by His Blood, and in that human nature will one day be our Judge, and our King for ever.

The prophets did not merely in general terms foretell the Redeemer's coming, but they specified many details and circumstances thereof. They foretold particularly:

1. The date and the circumstances of His birth, His life, Passion, and death.

2. His resurrection and ascension, and the descent of the Holy Ghost.

3. The destruction of Jerusalem, the rejection of the Jews, and the conversion of the Gentiles.

4. The foundation, growth, and permanence of His Church.

These prophecies were uttered centuries before the birth of Christ and preserved in the sacred books of the Jews; they were known long before our Lord's coming in countries far away from Judea, and they were all exactly fulfilled.

Christ and the apostles supplied the Jews with irrefutable evidence from the writings of the prophets that the Messiah had come and that Jesus of Nazareth was Himself the Messiah, because in Him all these prophecies were fulfilled.

In Jesus of Nazareth all the types were realized which in past ages had foreshadowed the actions and sufferings of the Messiah.

1. Types of His sufferings and death: Abel, Isaac, Joseph, David; the Paschal lamb, the propitiatory sacrifice, the brazen serpent.

2. Type of His priesthood: Melchisedech.



3. Type of His prophetic and mediatorial office: Moses.

4. Type of His resurrection: Jonas in the whale.

5. Types of His Church and the Sacraments: the ark (the Church), the Red Sea (Baptism), the Manna, and the Temple with all its arrangements and sacrifices.

The Divinity of Jesus Christ is proved:

1. By the utterances of the prophets.
2. By the testimony of His heavenly Father.
3. By His own testimony.
4. By the teaching of the apostles.
5. By the teaching of the Catholic Church.

The prophets repeatedly declared that the future Redeemer would be God.

At our Saviour's baptism in the Jordan, and at His transfiguration on Thabor, His heavenly Father bore testimony to Him, saying: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. iii, 17; xvii, 5).

Christ Himself bore witness that He is the Son of God, and true God as is His Father.

1. He spoke of Himself explicitly as the Son of God.
2. He ascribed to Himself divine attributes and spoke of Himself as being one with the Father.
3. He required all men to believe in His Divinity.
4. He required all men to honor Him as God.

The divinity of Christ is, furthermore, proved by His sanctity:

1. The sanctity of His life.
2. The exalted character and force of His doctrine.
3. His miracles and prophecies.
4. His death and His resurrection.



There is no taint of evil attaching to His life, nor the least trace of any moral weakness or imperfection.

The divinity of Christ is also proved by His teaching.

Christ's teaching is characterized by a sublimity far surpassing all human wisdom and by a force such as the doctrines of no philosopher and the founder of no other religion ever possessed.

The force of Christ's teaching is manifested in the extraordinary effect that it had upon mankind.

1. It has won the hearts of men.
2. It has renewed and transformed the world.
3. It has brought happiness to all who honestly accepted it.

The divinity of Christ is proved by His miracles.

The miracles in our Lord's life may be divided into wonderful events and wonderful actions. Among the wonderful events we reckon His birth, transfiguration, and resurrection. Christ's active miracles affected nature, men, and spirits.

The reality of Christ's miracles cannot be questioned, since they took place in public, in the presence of hundreds or even thousands of witnesses, and were not challenged even by His enemies.

The divinity of Christ is proved by His resurrection.

The fact of the resurrection affords conclusive evidence of the divinity of Christ and of the divine origin of Christianity. Our Lord Himself spoke of His resurrection as the chief proof of His divine mission, and the apostles regarded it as their most important task to bear testimony to this fact.

St. Paul said to the Corinthians: "If Christ be not



risen again, then is our preaching vain and your faith is also vain'' (1 Cor. xv, 14).

Jesus Christ really died. This is proved by:

1. His public execution following upon a death sentence.
2. The manner of His death, viz., crucifixion and a lance thrust.
3. The testimony of eyewitnesses.

Jesus Christ really rose again by His own power. His resurrection is most clearly attested by:

1. His apostles and disciples, who are trustworthy witnesses on account of their number, their honesty, and their spirit of self-sacrifice.
2. The behavior of our Lord's enemies, whose actions were prompted by their knowledge of His resurrection.

The divinity of Christ is proved by His prophecies.

The prophecies of Christ referred to His own person, His apostles, the fate of Jerusalem and of the Jewish nation, and the growth of His church.

The divinity of Christ is proved by the Apostles' teaching.

The apostles, who were Christ's companions and authorized to preach in His name, taught explicitly:

1. That Jesus is God.
2. That He possesses the whole fullness of the Godhead.
3. That all creatures ought to adore Him.

The apostles confirmed their teaching regarding the divinity of Christ by numerous miracles wrought in His name, and especially by the most astounding of all



miracles, the conversion of the world. In defence of this doctrine they suffered and died.

The miracles of the apostles are evidence of Christ's divinity, because, being sent by Him, they worked them in His name, in proof of their divine mission.

The divinity of Christ is the teaching of the Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church has always taught the divinity of Christ and has made this truth the chief and fundamental doctrine of Christianity. When in the fourth century Arius denied the divinity of Christ, the whole church rose up against him, and the Council of Nicaea (325) drew up a creed emphasizing the doctrine that Jesus Christ is truly God and of one substance with the Father.

The faith of the Church in the divinity of Christ is expressed most emphatically by the Christian martyrs. In every age thousands have suffered most cruel torments and death itself rather than deny this doctrine.

The history of the Christian martyrs unmistakably shows a supernatural character and is one of the most convincing proofs of the divinity of Christ and of the divine origin of Christianity.

The evidence in support of the divinity of Christ is absolutely convincing to the human intellect. The surest remedy for doubts on the subject is to lead a Christian and moral life. Our Saviour Himself says: "If any man will do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself" (John vii, 17).

But Jesus Christ is not only true God, but also true man. The third article of the Apostles' Creed teaches us that by the action of the Holy Ghost the Son of God became man and was born of Mary, a most pure Virgin.



Jesus Christ is only one divine Person. The Second Person of the Godhead assumed the human in addition to the divine nature, uniting them inseparably. Hence the Son of God in His human nature became as truly man as in His divine nature He has been truly God from all eternity.

Holy Scripture teaches the unity of the divine person.

1. It attributes divine and human characteristics to one and the same person, viz., Jesus Christ.

2. It ascribes divine attributes to the human nature in Christ, and human attributes to His divine nature.

In the one person of Jesus Christ there are two natures, one divine and one human. In His divine nature He acts as God, in His human nature He acts as man.

In the one person of Jesus Christ there are two distinct wills, one divine and one human, since each nature has its own will. The human will, however, was always in complete subjection to the divine.

“Father . . . not my will, but thine be done” (Luke xxii, 42).

From the unity of person in two natures it follows also that Mary may rightly be called Mother of God, for by the action of the Holy Ghost she gave birth to the true Son of God, not to a mere man. Rightly, too, do we call Mary “the Virgin,” for she remained ever an incomparably pure and spotless virgin, before, in, and after the birth of her divine Child.

The purpose of the incarnation was twofold. The Son of God became man:

1. In order to be able to suffer and die for us, since as God He could neither suffer nor die.



2. In order to teach us virtue and sanctity by His word and example.

You understand, my brethren, that the proofs which I have briefly sketched, can be much elaborated and amplified. It will do for our present purpose, however, to impress these chief points on our minds, so that our faith in Christ's glorious divinity may be the stronger, and our devotion to our divine Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, the more ardent. We may then hope that at the hour of our death He will also be our merciful judge.



## XII. The Choice of the Twelve

THE fragmentary Life of Christ which is recounted to the people by means of the Sunday Gospel, fails to stimulate interest, to fix the attention, and to give instruction, as is evidenced by the attitude, and the general ignorance, displayed by not a few of the flock.

No doubt, this unwarrantable and sad state of affairs can in no small measure be attributed to the fact that the scenes, works, and incidents of our Lord's Life are not made to live, but are merely accepted as episodes of some two thousand years ago. The detached Gospel events need to be set in their proper social and topographical surroundings.

How can one understand and appreciate thoroughly and with any advantage the Life of Christ, if one is not able to visualize the land and the conditions in which He lived and labored?

Surely then, if the Sunday Gospel is to grip and enlighten the minds of the congregation, as undoubtedly it should, it must be explained in a graphic and entertaining fashion, and to accomplish this desirable result, one will have made some progress in the right direction, if some ideas are given of the country, wherein the various events took place.

The spot chosen by Almighty God for the Incarnation of His divine Son, and for the revelation of Christ's religious Truths, is known to us as the Holy Land, or Palestine. The Sacred Scriptures aptly describe it as "a good land of brooks and of waters, and



of fountains: in the plains of which and the hills deep rivers break out: A land of wheat, and barley, and vineyards, wherein fig trees and pomegranates, and oliveyards grow: a land of oil and honey." It is called "Holy," because it is the land where the Word-Made-Flesh dwelt among men, and it was from there that the Gospel of Salvation was sent forth to the sin-stricken world. Palestine was originally known as "Philistia," and was used to designate the territory occupied by the Philistines. These people were of ancient caste, and were the avowed enemies of the Israelites, and it was only after repeated struggles that eventually, during the reign of David, the chosen people proved victorious. However, it was not until about the fourth century of the Christian era that the name of Palestine was applied to the country as a whole.

Though Palestine is only a little larger than the State of Vermont, or about the size of Wales, still it occupied a very prominent position on the map of the ancient world. Yet its position towards other lands was not less striking than its real or apparent isolation.

It was the design of Providence to segregate the Chosen People from the rest of the world, and no land seemed better adapted to that God-devised purpose. In length, it is about one hundred and forty miles, while its breadth varies from twenty to forty miles. For general purposes, suffice it to say that Palestine is at the Asiatic end of the Mediterranean Sea, and slightly north of Egypt. It is a mountainous district, and it can boast of broad, fertile plains, and a rather striking feature is the remarkable depression which divides the country into two halves.

Its chief river is the Jordan, which twists and



turns in a real serpentine fashion, and measures in length about two hundred miles, if one were to follow its various meanderings. In the springtime this river is very much swollen by the melting snows of Mt. Hermon and it overflows its banks, while at normal times it is so shallow in places that it is fordable. There are three lakes, the smallest being the Waters of Meron, the next in size is the Sea of Galilee, through which the Jordan passes, and which is remarkable for its abundance of fish, while the largest of the three is the "Dead Sea."

In Summer the heat is intense, so much so that any one would be well-advised not to visit Palestine in that season of the year.

During the hot season it is the custom, both in the city and in the country, for the people to sleep on the housetop, a custom which is very ancient. The houses have flat roofs, and they afford a delightful resting place, apart from their utility as sleeping places. For six or seven months of the year there is no rain at all. The first rains usually fall about November, and they begin with a heavy thunderstorm; and what is styled "the latter rain," comes about April. Each night, practically the whole year round, there is a copious dew. The snowfall is nothing to speak of, and apart from some of the high ridges, it seldom lies for any length of time.

Amongst the animals, the sheep and goats are the most prevalent, though oxen are to be seen here and there; and in the desert places there are found various wild animals, such as the hyena, leopard, wolf, jackal, boar and gazelle.

Acquaintance with these few facts should help one to visualize better the country in which Christ chose to lay the scenes of His missionary labors and miracu-



lous deeds. It is somewhat remarkable that, though the various details concerning the life and times of Christ are on record, yet there is no authoritative description, portrait, or even a hint of His personal appearance. In the early days of the Church, some attempts were made to represent the features and form of our blessed Lord. The first Christian art bearing on Jesus—that of the catacombs—was, however, purely symbolical, hence there is no likelihood of deriving any idea of the divine Person from these evidences.

However, in the fifteenth century there lived a historian, by name Nicephorus, and he has left on record a description of the person of Christ. “I shall describe,” he says, “the appearance of our Lord, as handed down to us from antiquity. He was very beautiful. His height was fully seven spans: His hair was bright auburn, and not too thick, and it was inclined to wave in soft curls.

“His eyebrows were black and arched, and His eyes seemed to shed from them a gentle golden light. They were very beautiful. His nose was prominent: His beard lovely, but not very long. . . . He stooped a little, but His body was well formed. His complexion was that of the ripe brown wheat, and His face, like that of His mother, rather oval than round, with only a little red in it, but through it there shone dignity, intelligence of soul, gentleness, and a calmness of spirit never disturbed.”

Since the evangelists have not even given a single hint of Christ’s appearance, and as there are no positive records as to what He looked like, these descriptions have no satisfactory value.

At all events, whatever His personal appearance may have been, this much is only too certain, namely,



that He must have had a characteristic charm, a conspicuous bearing, and a magnetic influence, for no sooner had John set eyes on Him, after His return from the wilderness, that He recognized the Messiah at once.

In further evidence of Christ's remarkable personality, I need only remind you that once Andrew and John, the beloved disciple, came in personal contact with Him they were forthwith irresistibly drawn to Him.

It would be as well if we recalled the circumstances of this occasion. One day, while John the Baptist was standing amongst his followers, conversing with them, he suddenly perceived Jesus approaching in the direction of the gathering, whereupon, pointing towards Him, while yet at a distance, he rapturously exclaimed: "Behold the Lamb of God: behold Him who taketh away the sins of the world."

This symbolic title of "Lamb" which John applied to the Redeemer of the world was, doubtless, due to the fact that he saw in Jesus the propitiation, which was, even then, bearing and carrying away the sin of the world. In the Old Law, lambs were frequently used in the Temple sacrifices, and they were a type of Him Who was to be the Lamb led to the slaughter of Calvary where He became the Innocent Victim in the Sacrifice of the New Law.

The day following the aforementioned event, the Baptist happened to be talking with two of his followers, Andrew and John, when Jesus again walked by, and no sooner had the Precursor recognized his divine Master, than he bade his two companions to "Behold the Lamb of God." This testimony was enough for the two God-fearing Galileans, who then and there followed the retreating figure of Christ.



Hearing the approach of footsteps, Jesus not unnaturally turned round, and found Andrew and John coming up to Him, whereupon, He gently inquired: "What seek ye? Who said to Him: Rabbi . . . where dwellest Thou? He saith to them: Come and see." They needed no further invitation and they forthwith followed Jesus, and listened intently to the discourse and teaching of their divine Friend, whom they must have recognized as the promised Messiah. Now Andrew had a brother by name Simon, who it appears must have been in the vicinity, for he went off and brought also Simon to our divine Lord.

As soon as Simon came into the presence of Jesus, the latter looked fixedly at the newcomer, then addressed him in this wise: "Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cèphas, which is interpreted Peter." No doubt this strange and perplexing reception must have filled the impulsive, blustering, yet loving, and noble-hearted Simon with wonder and awe, but how could he have had an inkling of the purport of such prophetic words? The very next day our blessed Lord, accompanied by His three disciples, set out for Galilee, and while, on the way, they met Philip, a native of Bethsaida, and a townsman of the other three.

Evidently, Philip possessed those necessary characteristics which were required in the chosen disciples, for Jesus unhesitatingly said to him, "Follow Me," and at this simple invitation he joined the little company. Full of joy and soul-stirring satisfaction and zeal at his apparently casual meeting and discovery of the Messiah, Philip at once became desirous to convey the great news to his friend Nathanael, who lived at Cana. Accordingly he went off, and found Nathanael sitting under a fig tree, and he communicated to him the



wonderful tidings that the long expected Messiah, the deliverer of nations, "Jesus the Son of Joseph of Nazareth" of whom Moses and the ancient prophets had spoken, was now actually in their midst. At the mention of Nazareth, which it would seem was a town of questionable repute, Nathanael became skeptical, for he asked: "Can anything good come from Nazareth?"

Philip was too happy and convinced of what he had said to be in an argumentative mood, and he merely replied: "Come and see."

Nathanael, though dubious about this discovery of the Messiah, accompanied his friend, feeling at the same time that if the fact were true, then one look, a word from the "Desired of Nations," would dispel his distrust. As he approached, our divine Lord greeted him as "an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile." Naturally enough, Nathanael realized that he was known, yet he could not refrain from asking how it had come about. Jesus then assured him that, before Philip called him, He had seen him sitting under the fig-tree. This display of superhuman knowledge was sufficient proof for Nathanael, who at once gave evidence of his faith, saying: "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel."

Strange as it may appear, Nathanael's name does not occur in the list of the Apostles, but it is always identified with Bartholomew, and this assumption meets with no opposition. In gathering round Him a number of disciples, Jesus was merely following the custom of those times.

The teachers of those days were surrounded by an inner circle of disciples, able in some measure, in the absence of their masters, to represent them in public, by speaking in the synagogues, answering questions, or undertaking missionary journeys, and these were to be



the duties of the disciples of Jesus. These five followers or fellow-laborers of Jesus, formed the cornerstone of the Apostolic college. Ere long it became necessary to increase the number, and then it was that our Saviour made the selection of the Apostles, but where, exactly, this took place, is not definitely stated.

To be an apostle meant bidding farewell to home, giving up all family ties, casting aside all worldly pursuits and prospects, bearing patiently indignities and opposition, then after a trying test going forth and carrying the Gospel message to a sin-stricken people. Such qualifications demanded real sturdy characters, and before embarking upon the exacting selection of these laborers, Christ betook Himself to the hilly district by the Sea of Galilee, so that in solitude and prayer, He could hold commune with His Heavenly Father, and thereupon inaugurate His momentous undertaking. By this time, Jesus had obtained a large following, but He only choose twelve of them, "that they might be with Him, and that He should send them forth to preach—to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils." He chose Peter, the impulsive, warm-hearted fisherman, and Andrew, his brother, about whom little is known; John, the gentle and much loved disciple, who outlived them all; James, the first to be martyred; then Philip, so conspicuous for his zeal and simplicity; after whom came Bartholomew, the one who seemed to be rather skeptical, yet decidedly practical and thoughtful. All these are familiar names: but Jesus had not completed His selection yet.

Thus He chose Thomas, an ardent soul, weak, yet quick to make amends; James the Less and Jude two brothers from Capharnaum; and Simon of Galilee. There was also Matthew, who in his deep humility did



not fear to style himself the "publican"—the hated and hired taxgatherer of the Romans, and it is to him that we are indebted for the first, if not the finest life of Christ. Last of all came Judas, the traitor, of the village of Kerioth in Judea, who soon fell away from his high calling. These are the twelve, and they were called Apostles, selected by Christ to be His intimate friends, pillars of the Church, preachers of the Gospel. O! what a privilege it must have been to have entered into such close fellowship with Jesus, to have journeyed with Him from place to place, to have witnessed His wondrous miracles, to have been with Him in the cornfields, or by Him when He preached to the multitude. And yet, my Brethren, an equal privilege is ours, for, like the Apostles, we may in very deed enjoy a like friendship, walk with Him, and talk with Him, even as friend talks with friend.

But how can we enter into such close fellowship with God? Is not God great and holy and Divine, and man little, sinful, and human? A story and its lesson will best explain how we can walk with God.

It is related that an old villager once said to David Livingstone, when he was but a lad, that he ought to make religion the everyday business of his life, and not a thing of fits and starts, assuring him that if he did not, then temptation and evil habits would get the mastery of him.

The advice was almost a prophecy, so completely did Livingstone endeavor to live up to that ideal, suggested by the aged villager.

Brethren, if it be so with us, then we shall walk with God.

There are too many, alas, who, relegate religion to one hour a week, people who when they have been to



Mass, imagine that God has finished with them for the next six days.

Let this be the motto of your heart to-day: "God helping me, I will be a sincere and fervent Catholic. Others may be profane, but no oath shall pass my lips: others may cheat and thieve, such fraudulency shall never be done by me: others may waste their time, I will redeem it because it is precious: others may trifle with, and ruin their neighbor's character, but I shall never do him harm: others may squander their energies and their life, I am born for something higher. I am traveling to the great unknown, to the land of saints. Earthly friends and company I love: but O! the company of the redeemed, of the blood-washed, of angels and of God in Heaven, is higher than these companionships here below. Man's honors are good, his rewards attractive, his promises many, but I aspire to a mansion and a throne, and crown of glory that never fadeth." If such language be heart-felt, then he who utters it, is indeed walking with God, living with Him, and entering into the closest possible friendship with the Best of Friends. Not only must we walk with God but we must also make progress, for there is no standing still in the spiritual life. Thus we must become holier and holier, year by year. He who consorts with a loftier soul than his own grows like to his companion. In such ennobling and spiritualizing company, the aspirations and endeavors are kept at full tension.

The powerful influence of the higher commands the imitation of the lower. The more we know of God the more Godlike do we become and we are unconsciously changed into something spiritually superior. Just as that bold lad, who climbed higher than any of his fellows up the crag in Virginia, found that his only



safety was to climb to the very top, because he could not descend without a deadly fall, so we rejoice to know that every upward step in the spiritual life makes another needful: nor may we rest until we scale the very summit of the hill of the Lord, and rest forever in His presence.



### XIII. The Sermon on the Mount

IN the selection of the twelve Apostles no one can fail to notice how our divine Lord chose what seemed to be the most unlikely and unfitted men to assume, and eventually to accomplish, the herculean task of christianizing the then civilized world. These men could not boast of position, learning, intellectual attainments, or prestige; they did not possess any culture, influence, riches, indeed they apparently had no recommendation at their command which could in any way encourage and assist them in their momentous, and what was after all, an unprecedented undertaking.

When a man, or a body of men, are called upon to occupy some notable and responsible post or trust, they are invariably reckoned and accredited as being worthy of and equal to the occasion, yet in the case of the Apostles, there seemed a patent lack of those qualifications which are so essential for the discharge of any important duty.

Yet, Christ did not hesitate to select these simple, unassuming, unrefined, uneducated, and apparently incompetent men, to confound the wise, to overcome the obdurate, to baffle the power of the mighty, to instruct the learned, to overturn the religion of the heathen, to propagate Christianity, and, in a sense, to renew the very face of the earth.

The life-work of these zealous, eager, loyal-hearted and God-fearing disciples was something akin to the



impossible, or rather to the unique, and, naturally enough, a special training and complete instruction were absolutely indispensable, if they were to realize and attain this Christ-given ideal. There is no evidence of any formal instruction, such as given by the Rabbis to their followers; hence, they must have gained all the necessary enlightenment and training from their close association with and observation of their divine Master. Their spiritual character was not disciplined by any set systematic course of theology, but was rather influenced and developed by the personality and Divinity of our blessed Lord.

He, alone, arrested the gaze of their eye, the attention of their minds, and the love of their hearts; in a word, they resolved to imitate their Master. Obviously, too, they would learn not a little from their daily intercourse and journeyings with the Son of God; then again, His discourses, His miracles, His attitude to and treatment of the wayward, the down-fallen, and the outcast, and the other various evidences and testimony of His Messianic calling were all instrumental in producing the desired effect.

However, no sooner had He appointed the twelve Apostles, than He made occasion for giving them a detailed statement of the conditions, principles, and laws, which were to be the grand charter of the New Kingdom of God which He came to establish, and which He wanted them to extend.

These divinely-appointed coöperators, and successors needed a statement of, and an initiation into the laws, under which they were to live and labor, and this was effected by the preaching of the Sermon on the Mount. According to the traditional contention, this mountain was the so-called *Koroun-Hattin*, which is on the road from Tiberias to Nazareth.



The hill has a fancied resemblance to horns, hence the name *Koroun-Hattin*, which signifies the Horns of Hattin. *Koroun-Hattin* is also known as the "Mount of the Beatitudes," sometimes styled "Mount of Jesus Christ," because our Lord is supposed to have prayed there on many occasions while another name is the "Mountain of the Apostles," in consequence of them having been chosen on its summit.

The mount has two peaks or horns, between which, about a few hundred feet above the road, there extends a broad turf-grown plateau, which is an admirable spot for accommodating a large gathering of people.

Now, our blessed Lord, after He had passed the whole night on the mountain in prayer, forthwith made the formal and final selection of the Apostles.

His choice made, He, along with the twelve, came to the broad level plateau where had gathered a great multitude of people, who sought our divine Lord that He might attend to their spiritual and bodily needs. This vast crowd had not only come from the thickly populated shores of the Sea of Galilee, which was comparatively near, but some had even journeyed from Judea and Jerusalem—nay, many had actually come from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, a distance of forty miles or more.

The preaching and the miracles of our Lord had attracted not only the poor and the down-trodden, but personages of noble rank and title came from distant parts of the country to see Him, to converse with Him, to hear His discourses, and to witness His wonderful works.

Before addressing the large crowd, He attended to the physical wants of the sorely afflicted, whose various diseases He cured.

Indeed, so marvelous and implicit was the faith of



the people, and, so intense their excitement and enthusiasm, that they sought merely to touch our blessed Lord, knowing that thereby they would be healed.

These miraculous cures were evidence enough of Christ's Divinity, and they naturally disposed the crowd to listen with eager attention and increased faith. Furthermore these irrefutable wonders gave a more emphatic and more authoritative sanction to the doctrines which He was about to propound.

Now in those days it was the custom for the teacher to sit while he was giving his instructions, hence our divine Lord sat probably on some rock, while His disciples and the people lay about on the grass. Overhead was the blue Syrian sky; in the foreground was the beautiful Sea of Galilee, whose waters assume every variety of tint, in response to the ever-changing light; then far away in the distance one could descry the glittering heights of the snow-tipped Mt. Hermon. With such a pleasing panorama to greet the eye, and surrounded by an eager audience of expectant hearers, Jesus, with His outer cloak of dark blue thrown back, showing the white inner tunic that came down to His sandalled feet, began to promulgate that unique, time-honored, and God-inspired message, which is the very epitome of Christianity, and the very pith and marrow of Christ-like perfection. At this period of His missionary career, the Jews recognized to an appreciable extent that Jesus was the Messiah, and in the Sermon on the Mount, that He was about to speak to them of the Kingdom of God.

It was as a teacher that Christ gathered round Him the disciples, and drew the multitudes, hence it is expedient that we take a momentary survey of this particular sphere of work, which played such an important



rôle in His earthly sojourn. To understand the duties and the extent of a teacher's task, it is indispensable that one should have some general impression and correct prospective of the sphere in which he lived and taught. At the time of Christ, the world was indeed a very hard and inhuman spot, and without going into detail, the documentary evidence, the treatment of criminals, the existence of slavery, which "was an accepted axiom of all social and economic life," and the woeful uncertainty concerning God, which reacted on the daily lives of the people, are sufficient data to enable any one to understand the distressing and almost unlivable conditions which then prevailed.

Obviously enough, the principal task of Jesus was to induce men to seek God again, and thus bring man to face the fact that there was a God.

Our divine Saviour had to establish amongst the people the absolute importance of completely committing one's self into the hands of God, which meant prompt and total surrender and childlike obedience to God and His holy Will. To accomplish this unique and novel ideal, He had naturally enough to quote His authority, produce His commission, and lay open His credentials, all of which had to be above suspicion and beyond reproach. To effect this, He could cite the testimony of the prophets, who foretold that the Messiah would be a teacher, and He did not fail to announce that such was His peculiar office.

The evidences of the New Testament make it quite clear that His authority was from God, besides, at His Transfiguration did not His heavenly Father proclaim His Divinity, and as a final confirmation of His commission, is not there the unmistakable testimony of His many miracles? As regards the aim of Christ's teaching, it is well to realize that He had to represent



God not so much as a Creator, Ruler, Provider, and as a Being of infinite power and majesty, but rather as a God of Love, and as the Father of mankind.

The ancients, apart from the Jewish nation, had no conception of what we call sin. As long as a deed was not against the public law, any act, however foul, was legitimate.

With such strange notions and views abroad, man had to be acquainted with and be persuaded of his responsibilities, he had to be apprised of the nature, of the havoc, and the consequences of sin, he had to be instructed in the ways and means of realizing his obligations, and he had to be assured of a future life, which would be happy or miserable, according as he had lived.

With regard to the form of Our Lord's preaching, this depended on circumstances. Thus there is a fair variety, comprising doctrinal subjects, moral reflection, controversial items, and formal accusations, and they were usually presented as sermons or as parables. Of the many discourses which our Saviour gave, numerous fragments are preserved in the various Gospels, but no lengthy abstract of any single one is given, except that of the Sermon on the Mount.

He opened this admirable discourse by promulgating the solemn and momentous truths of the Messianic Kingdom, and He presents these truths in the form of Eight Beatitudes.

The introductory parts of the Sermon are a marked contrast between the Old Covenant and the New Kingdom of God, for in the former the Law was set forth with menaces, prohibitions and commands, whereas in the New Dispensation it opens with benedictions, and moves in an atmosphere of promise and enticements. In the Eight Beatitudes, which are the



general principles of true morality, we find various and desirable sentiments and inculcations, and if we endeavor to follow them, we shall be blessed and happy, not only here, but hereafter. The first three—poverty, meekness and mourning, are the virtues necessary to be practiced, if we are to check the inclinations to riches, to overcome and calm the promptings of passion, and to shun the pleasures and allurements of the world. The remaining five are suggestions which, if taken to heart, will dispose us to a good life, and thus set us along the high road to eternal bliss.

After this introduction, which may be regarded as a summary of the entire discourse, our divine Saviour addresses Himself to the Apostles, in that He outlines their mission, and incites them to be zealous and persevering in their arduous task by recalling the great dignity of the office He had so recently conferred upon them. Continuing, He shows how He has come to reform, not to revolutionize, and to fulfill, not destroy the Law, since the rigid but merely external observance of the letter and form, had led to the neglect both of the spirit and the substance of its constitution.

Religion had become merely a mechanical service, and its legislative aspect had been artfully evaded by a process of subtle casuistry, for which the Pharisees had been mainly responsible.

With a system so hollow, and so eaten up with specious, quibbling discriminations, Christ could not even effect a compromise. Hence He finds it necessary to define various precepts, taking first the negative aspect, and, second, the positive legislation. In passing, suffice it to say, that He touches upon anger, vindictiveness, hatred of enemies, the marriage offenses, divorce, rash judgment, severity in demanding restitution, sim-



plicity in speech, humility, almsgiving, prayer, fasting, and the obstacles to Christian perfection. Finally, He concludes His wonderful sermon by urging His hearers to exercise a great love and devotion to Himself, which is to be shown by humble and continuous efforts after the likeness to God, and by the imitation of His own pure and universal love to mankind.

Such in brief are the outlines of the Sermon on the Mount, and was it any wonder that when our dear Lord had finished His stirring address, the vast multitude were in admiration of His doctrine? For He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes and Pharisees.

Christ had but a single purpose in 'delivering this discourse, namely to change men, to make them imitate Himself, to inoculate them with Godliness, and rescue them from themselves, and this would be accomplished if they would live up to the principles He laid down, and of course this imposed on one and all a personal duty. Every child of man is placed in this world of ours not to do what he likes; not to get whatever he can; not to make himself the center of all pleasures and passions; not to pile up possessions and wealth; not to satisfy every impulse and desire; no, this is not the purpose of man's existence, and such false and ignoble aspects of human life retire ashamed and confused at the approach of the royal and commanding word of duty.

The thought of duty teaches us the truth, and reveals to us the proper and inalienable responsibility, which a wise God has deemed fit to impose on all. Duty makes it obvious that there is something due from every man, woman and child to God and man; something which every creature owes; something which he ought to be and do; that he has to pay out as well



as take in; that if he shrinks from his obligation or shirks his debt, his duty, then his life in the sight of God is not honest, and sooner or later he will be called to account.

Now, duty never leaves man for a single moment, for, whatever be his avocation in life, he has always some charge or other to fulfill. You can conceive no circumstance in which there is not something which a man ought to do and to be.

For instance: A man sets out in the world to make money, to make what is styled a competence—to be independent. Independent of what? Independent of cares that harass people who unfortunately cannot boast of an ample income; of the troubles which beset men and women whose livelihood is hard to earn and full of afflictions and dangers; independent of the pecuniary assistance of relatives, friends, and neighbors—independent of these things, yes. But, independent of duty? Now that he is rich and leisured, is he to become inconsiderate, lazy, selfish, and indifferent to the calls and cares of others? Has he now no more responsibility in the great work of God's world? No duty to his fellow men, to his country, his town, to the struggling lives around, the poor, the unfortunate and the down-trodden? Independent of duty, is he? If he acts as if he were, he shirks his duty, he casts aside his God-appointed obligations, he discredits his manhood, he becomes a worthless wretch and a pest in society, he disobeys the injunctions laid down by Christ in His Sermon on the Mount, and eventually his divine Judge will call him to task.

Or take the opposite case: 'A' man falls into adversity. His wealth, his health, his family, his property and possessions, and character are taken from him; he is in distress, those that knew him have



left him and have no further interest in, or use for him, his plight and abandonment cannot be put into words; there seems nothing left but despair or suicide.

In that terrible hour of dereliction, in that furnace of trial, in that Calvary of torture, there is something which he ought to do and be.

He is being tested. Now it is his duty to accept all with resignation, to endure patiently, to wait hopefully, to recognize in it all the divine will of his Master, and to pray for strength from on high, in which strength he can conquer. Thus our duty often changes its shape and scope, though in its essence it never can and never will change.

We have schemes for tomorrow—active work in the world, perhaps; our duty may be professional, commercial, clerical, priestly, political, domestic; work with the hands or work with the brain; and tomorrow morning we mean to set about it and endeavor to do it well. But tonight we are stopped, some unforeseen intervention arises. Sickness lays us low, we are called to the death-bed of our father, and tomorrow we are, so to speak, prisoners of circumstance, and our schemes of the previous night are no longer possible. Is our duty gone? No; it is merely changed. Not activity but patience is now set before us; not vigorous action among our fellow men in the busy and noisy world, but gentleness, consideration for others, and resignation to God's will. The form and the scene is changed, but not the essence. Thus duty is always there—constant, unremitting.

Duty is not partial nor superficial; it goes down to the depths, to the roots of every human life.

For example, a man is a soldier. As a soldier he does his duty well, faithfully, and courageously, in times of peace, as well as in times of difficulty and



danger. But from a religious and God-fearing point of view, we must see even further than that.

This man is a good deal more than a soldier; he is a son, a husband and perhaps a father, a friend, a citizen, a member of the Blessed Sacrament Confraternity. Does he do his duty in these and other spheres?

Amidst all distractions and delights, amidst trials, temptations and triumphs, in adversity or prosperity, in health or in sickness, and be we young or old, no matter, duty is ever calling us to do and to be.

Christ in His Sermon on the Mount sets forth our various duties, thereby urging us to be pure not merely in deed, but in thought and desire, showing us that charity must extend to all, friend and foe alike, demanding strict observance of marital obligations, inculcating prayer and self-denial, calling on us to be as true as steel, expecting us to go through life as real and loyal disciples, and proffering a reward ineffable, if only we persevere in complete accord with His holy Will.



## XIV. The Parables of Christ

WHENEVER occasion demanded, our divine Lord used to venture forth into the unknown realms of the future, and make the most detailed references to events, long before they actually occurred. Thus in reading the Gospel story of His life, we cannot fail to observe the frequent and unmistakable evidence of His prophetic character.

Recall His most extraordinary prophetic utterances concerning His Passion, Death, and Resurrection, His similar pronouncements about His disciples, His Church, the abrogation of the Old Law, the rejection of the Jewish Nation, the destruction of Jerusalem, and when we recollect that all these prophecies were fulfilled with such accuracy, we are apt to visualize them as past history, rather than anticipated events.

Circumstances show that our blessed Saviour viewed all things in their vivid and actual setting, He foreknew their causes, their design, their development, and their consequences, and so convinced were the Jews of His day that He was a prophet, that they openly avowed Him to be such.

Manifestly, Christ Himself had no misgivings, or grounds for calling into question His own feeling and verdict on the matter; indeed He was so emphatic about His prophetic privilege and claim, that on one occasion He aptly remarked: "At present I tell you, before it come to pass: that when it shall come to pass, you may believe that I am He," thereby making it most



clear that He was fully aware of the course of events, prior to their actual occurrence. Although to us these are overwhelming and irrefutable confirmations of His Divinity, nevertheless, according to the general custom of mankind, He was not recognized or accepted as a prophet by His own country.

Doubtless His lowly position, His lack of all worldly display and influential connections, His unmarked career, and His unconcern about popularity, would account for the townsfolk of Nazareth repudiating and rejecting Him. At any rate He recognized that His own kith and kin cared not for Him, for did He not say that "no prophet is accepted in His own country"? and in consequence of this, and in view of His divine mission, He found it better to seek a home elsewhere. To get away from the counteracting prejudices and ill-will in His own native town, He decided to make His home at Capharnaum, which was a thriving and busy town, beautifully situated on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Capharnaum signifies "city of consolation," and though its exact site cannot now be definitely located, still it is usually identified with Tell-Hum, which is on the north-west coast of the Lake, about three miles south-west of the point where the Jordan makes its entry. Though Josephus, the historian, styled it a village, yet there are sufficient data for concluding that it must have been a place of considerable importance, for it could boast of a custom house, tax-collectors, a large camp garrisoned by Roman soldiers, a centurion and other officials, as well as civil authorities, together with a population of some fifteen to twenty thousand inhabitants, and these numbers were often enough augmented by many visitors, who were attracted by the mild climate and picturesque surroundings.



What would certainly lead one to conclude that it was a fair-sized town was the fact that it formed a good center for Christ's missionary activities, and it is referred to as "His own city."

Its frequent mention in the Gospels is due to our blessed Lord making it His temporary home, and it is interesting to note that His mother and His "brethren," likewise, for a time at least, made it their home, though a little later we find Jesus living permanently as a guest in the house of Peter, as if they had once more left the town, and returned to Nazareth. Though in the Old Testament Capharnaum is not mentioned at all, yet in the Gospels it occupies a very prominent place, for it was there that Jesus delivered many of His discourses; that He chose His first disciples; that He cured the centurion's servant, Peter's mother-in-law, a paralytic, a demoniac, and it was there, too, that He raised to life the daughter of Jairus. It was the capital of that part of Galilee, and being on the high road from Damascus, it was a suitable halting place for tradesmen from Syria and Phoenicia.

There were not many Jews in that district, in fact they must have formed a very insignificant and poor colony, for they were not equal to the task of building their own synagogue. A Roman officer had erected one for them, apparently for the purpose of ingratiating himself with the Jewish community. "Round the synagogue, and reaching up the gentle slopes behind, stretched the streets and squares, covering an area of half-a-mile in length, and a quarter in breadth," while in the vicinity there were numerous medicinal springs, hence it was reckoned a town of no small consequence.

The fertility of the soil in those parts made the district very suitable for farming, for orchards and vineyards, and, along with the fishing trade of the



Lake, these industries formed the principal source of employment. In this flourishing town, and amidst a population which was decidedly cosmopolitan, Christ took up His abode, and, as we can readily understand, such a busy center was ideally adapted to the preaching of the Gospel. Apart from Capharnaum being honored by Jesus in making His new home there, it also became memorable on account of His adoption of a new style of instruction in its vicinity.

Apparently His former style of discourse did not seem to Him suited to the new conditions and surroundings, so He availed Himself of a new and simpler form of instruction, namely that of the parable, which was more adapted to the mentality and character of His audience. Of course our divine Lord adopted for His teaching a style then prevalent, and it is not to be assumed that the parable form of teaching was new or original.

The parable, the Hebrew word for which is *Mashal*, was a mode of discourse in frequent use among the Rabbis, and it has been in vogue since the time of the Judges.

Writers who have had occasion to define a parable have found it no easy task to give such a satisfying definition as to omit none of its distinctive marks, and at the same time include nothing superfluous and merely accidental, hence precision and clarity will have to characterize our present attempt. Doubtless it will help considerably to simplify matters, if we state first what a parable is *not*.

A parable cannot be classified as a *fable*, because this style of story is not true to nature or to life, and merely sets forth some worldly ideal, and not anything spiritual or heavenly. The parable differs, furthermore, from the mythic narrative or *legend*, which



is merely conjectural, and without any basis of fact, though it may convey an admirable moral, whereas the parable has its counterpart in life, and is founded on real or possible scenes or events in the world around us. Again, a parable is distinguishable from a *proverb*, though these two terms have become interchangeable in the Gospels, and the difference seems to lie in the fact that a *proverb* is enigmatical, obscure, and an uncommon saying, while these characteristics cannot apply rightly to a parable. Very near the mark, was the little girl who said that a parable is "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning"; and we may not be far wrong if we define it to be a narrative, true to nature or to life, used for the purpose of conveying spiritual truth to the mind of the hearer. We may say that a parable is in general a comparison or a parallel, by means of which some abstract and spiritual truth is unraveled and made more comprehensible. Its characteristic is the presentation of moral and religious truth in a more vivid form than is possible by mere precept or abstract statement, use being made for this end of some incident drawn from life or nature, by which the lesson sought to be given is pictured to the eye, and thus imprinted on the memory, and made more emphatic. One would have thought that the fervor, the originality, the grandeur of the doctrine and the divine inspiration of Christ, not to mention His gentle disposition, keen insight, and irresistible personality, would have been quite sufficient to commend His words, and to win the attention and the hearts of His hearers, yet He found it necessary to change His form of address. Why, then, did He employ a different method of teaching and deem it expedient to adopt the parabolic form of discourse? There is no doubt that Jesus employed this characteristic style of instruction for



the set purpose of more surely attracting and gripping the attention of the people.

Every one knows how interest is aroused and attention arrested by the telling of some story, or by citing some incident apropos of one's remarks, and we all have experience of the eager expectancy, attention, and general hush which prevails amongst an audience or congregation when the speaker illustrates his point by some striking and parallel anecdote, or clinches his argument by some apt episode. Now, none knew better than our Lord this natural tendency of audiences, hence He proceeded to secure the attention of those gathered round Him by making use of those beautiful parables.

The homeliest trifles were employed to explain some sublime truth, some happy comparison explained a divine doctrine, man's duty was inculcated by some simple incident or narrative, while some different truth was elucidated by pointing to its counterpart in one's daily surroundings. This simple and attractive style of teaching, which readily appealed both to the imagination and to the intellect, helped considerably in establishing our Lord's popularity as a preacher. The sower on the hill-side, the flowering weeds amongst the corn, the woman kneading her dough, or sweeping the house in search of some money she had lost, the Samaritan befriending the man who had fallen into the hands of robbers, the shepherd going after the sheep that had strayed, the importunate friend calling at midnight, the father receiving home his wayward and long-lost son, the incidents and associations at the marriage-feast, and the laborers in the vineyard,—and other everyday occurrences served in turn and as occasion demanded, to illustrate and to bring home to the minds and hearts of His hearers some lofty truth and sub-



lime lesson. It had been prophesied that Christ would adopt this form of preaching: "I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden from the foundation of the world"; and the Orientals delighted in this parabolic method, as they preferred mystic and figurative language and exemplifications to cold and formal statements.

The easy and obvious application of the story would of course stimulate reflection, stir up inquiry, and the people would diagnose the veiled meaning and the lesson to be culled from it.

Finally, we may say that this familiar and captivating style became a pleasing coating for the stern truth, for had our Saviour revealed the rigor of His Gospel dispensation too abruptly and too plainly, many of the people would have been repelled, and would have given Him no further heed. These parabolic utterances made His doctrines palatable, they ingratiated Him with His audiences; they removed prejudices, and disarmed His adversaries.

Just a word or two now on how parables are to be interpreted.

The parables, fair in their outward form, are yet fairer within, 'apples of gold in network of silver'; each one of them like a casket, itself of exquisite workmanship, but in which jewels yet richer than itself are laid up; or as fruit, which, however lovely to look upon, is yet in its inner sweetness more delectable still. Since the parables contain so much significance and enlightenment, naturally no definite rule or precise canon can be laid down as to how one can, or must, proceed, when interpreting their aim and meaning.

As a general course of procedure, we may safely suggest that the style of introduction, and the circumstances or surroundings in which it was originated or



delivered, will give some indication as to what is the main purpose of a parable. Instances may be cited, when the object is indicated in the opening phrase of the parable, thus "the kingdom of heaven is like, etc.," sometimes a query has been put to our Divine Lord, and in reply He has given a parable, while on occasion the precise reason or purpose is definitely stated. At all events, when we have ascertained the main drift or grasped some leading idea, then we should not encounter much difficulty in unraveling its meaning or message. Once we have secured a firm grasp of the central truth, we must not press too anxiously and too minutely every circumstance of a parable, for we shall miss the full force of a parable when we try to find a meaning in every fold of its drapery. We shall then derive great benefit and instruction by proceeding to interpret one of these parables, and that of *the sower* may very fittingly be selected as our model.

It was evidently the time for sowing the seed, and as our divine Lord rested by the shore of the Sea of Galilee, a crowd of eager followers, all anxious that He should speak to them, crowded round Him so that He stepped into a boat, which He caused to be pushed out a little, in order that He might be better heard by all. As He looked out over the vast assembly, His eye descried in the distance a sower busily engaged in casting forth the seed, and this sight inspired Him to deliver from His novel pulpit that wondrous parable, which is the first of the series, and which served as a model both of narrative and interpretation. "Behold the sower went forth to sow. And whilst he sowed some fell by the wayside, and the birds of the air came and ate them up. And some fell upon stony ground, where they had not much earth: and they sprung up immediately, because they had no deepness of earth.



And when the sun was up they were scorched: and because they had no root, they withered away. And others fell among thorns: and the thorns grew up and choked them. And others fell upon good ground: and they brought forth fruit, some an hundred fold, some sixty fold, and some thirty fold. He that hath ears to hear let him hear" (Matt. xiii. 3-9).

When Christ then found that even His disciples did not grasp its purport and its moral, He gave a brief explanatory paraphrase, thus disclosing the spiritual significance of the story. He told them that the *seed* was the Word of God—the gospel message, while the *wayside*, *stony ground*, *thorns*, were the various influences which impeded and practically rendered impossible the establishing and developing of the New Kingdom in the hearts of men.

However in the case of some men the *seed* fell *upon the good ground*, and then the results were fruitful and gratifying, but varying in degree according to greater or lesser coöperation.

The efficacy did not depend only on the work of the sower, nor even on the quality of the seed (though these elements must not be underrated) but also on the nature and the condition of the soil.

This in brief was the first parable of our blessed Lord, and it was delivered by the shores of the Sea of Galilee, on the outskirts of Capharnaum, which though at one time "His own city," was eventually denounced for its sins.

As then, so now and here the effects of the preaching of the Word of God depend not entirely on the Gospel message, but upon the character and disposition of the hearers.

It is a remarkable fact, but none the less true, that this particular aspect of the matter is lost sight of



by many of our modern congregations, for experience proves that they are ever ready to attribute the responsibility principally to the preacher, and not to themselves.

Many people these days, if the sermon is not to their liking or considered by them dry and without interest, criticize the preacher, absolutely ignoring the fact that the fruit of a sermon depends on the dispositions of the hearer. Criticism of the pulpit is decidedly prevalent, but it is not decidedly wise, and I venture to affirm that no matter how apparently inadequate or uninteresting a sermon may seem, none the less, so long as it is the Word of God, some good may be gained with the good-will of the listener.

It is the duty of every member of the congregation to keep in touch and accord with the preacher, but some people seem to occupy their time during a sermon in watching for the occasion to find fault with the preacher or his discourse. These self-appointed critics would give the impression that preaching was one of the lost arts, whereas it is the fact rather that the willing hearing of the Word of God has often enough disappeared. People ought not to come to church to hear something new, they ought to come that they may hear the Word of God, and understand its purport. It avails nothing, if people merely go away and say they have heard a fine, eloquent or grand oration. You come to be taught the sense of God's word and the best sermon is the one which sends you away most clearly understanding and most deeply feeling the meaning and purpose of it.

Every person in the congregation would do well to ask himself why he is in church, then he would be more fit and certainly more alert to receive the Gospel-message, which God in His providence has deemed wise



to promulgate each Sunday. What is needed nowadays is attention and good-will among the hearers, plain-speaking men in the pulpit, and plain-spoken sermons.

What is wanted is heart-searching truth, preaching that will stimulate and influence for better each and every soul in the congregation, preaching that will arouse and convert the sinner, and preaching that will do good and touch the hearts of all.



## XV. The Sea of Galilee—The Stilling of the Tempest

To the traveler, as well as to the “stay-at-home,” the names of famous lakes, such as Lake Como, Lake Killarney, and lakes in Switzerland, Germany and other countries are quite familiar, and important historical incidents are recorded in connection with them, but there is none so widely known as the Lake of Galilee, which is so redolent with the memories of our dear Redeemer. That beautiful and deservedly-famed expanse of bright, light blue water was especially dear to the Heart of Jesus, and though it is only small in extent, nevertheless it is unquestionably great in its associations, memories and wonders, and its crowning glory lies in the fact that as God made seven seas in the Land of Chanaan, “He had chosen only one for Himself: the Sea of Galilee.” This heaven-favored lake, and its confines, which Josephus aptly called, “the crown” of Palestine, is invested with sacrosanct traditions and unparalleled interests, for there were enacted the scenes of many wonderful events recorded in the Gospels. On the shores of that historic inland sea, Christ the Son of God dwelt amongst men, teaching them “the Way, the Truth, and the Life,” and unfolding to them the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. While He sojourned on the banks of that lake, He selected the first group of His Apostles, those great men who coöperated with Him in the mighty task of founding and spreading His Church.

From a boat, anchored a little way from the land,



He addressed more than once the vast and eager throng which in its enthusiasm and excitement used to crowd the beach, and it was into the waters of that same lake that He bade Peter and his brother to let down the nets for the miraculous draught of fishes. Upon its waves He often sailed, and on one occasion He even walked upon them, and once, when they were lashed into relentless fury, He rebuked the winds and calmed the raging sea. The Sea of Galilee is the largest fresh water lake of Palestine: it stretches north and south, is of irregular oval shape, and was in the Old Testament called the Sea of Cenereth or Chinnereth, whereas in the New Testament it has various names as we shall see.

The lake is about twelve miles in length, and somewhat less than seven miles across at its widest part, and so remarkably clear is the atmosphere that the distance from shore to shore seems but a few hundred yards. "There are no bold headlands, no lofty cliffs, and no prominent peaks to break the outline, but there are a few hills which rise in dull monotony from the lake side. It lies in the Jordan gorge, some six or seven hundred feet below the level of the Mediterranean, and this great depression, and the gusts of wind which rush down the Jordan valley from the heights of Mt. Hermon, are accountable for frequent, sudden, and violent storms. During these squalls those who are sailing the angry billows have to exercise most skillful seamanship. Though other, minor rivers flow into the Sea of Galilee, it is mainly fed by the river Jordan, whose source is among the snows of Mt. Hermon, and after its course through this lake, it eventually empties itself in the Dead Sea. The depth exceeds nowhere 150 feet, and many and choice fish disport themselves in its sweet and wholesome waters, while



on its banks there once grew every kind of tree, from those that grow in the tropical zone, to those of the Arctic region, while now "no trees, no villages, and no spots of cultivated land break the desolation which spreads like a living death over the landscape, except along the narrow stripe of green, about a quarter of a mile in breadth, that fringes the lake." If you were to summon up from the shades of death some of the ancient celebrities of that country and you were to ask them to tell you the name of this particular inland sea, you would get a variety of answers. Thus, Moses would call it the Sea of *Cenereth* (*Chinnereth*), then, coming down to Apostolic times, Matthew would style it the Sea of *Galilee*, Luke would tell you that it was the Lake of *Genesareth*, while John would favor the title of the Sea of *Tiberias*, then if you wanted the opinion of an ancient pagan, Pliny would inform you that it was the Lake of *Tarichea*, and if you were to question an Arab of to-day you would be told that it was *Tabariyeh*. Nowadays the region of this lake is barren and desolate and sparsely peopled.

One might be inclined to ask, why our Divine Lord, who had come to save the world, did not go to some more important places instead of confining, to an appreciable extent, His missionary activities to the regions of the Sea of Galilee.

Why did He not visit Babylon the great, Athens the seat of learning and culture, Cairo of historic renown, Thebes the hundred-gated, and Rome, the imperial, the mistress of the world?

The fact is, however, that though to-day the Sea of Galilee and its shores are practically deserted, there still remain extensive ruins of palaces, temples, coliseums, synagogues, theaters, hippodromes, gymnasi-ums, towers, gardens and villas terraced on the hill-



sides, all of which bear unmistakable testimony to the culture and the civilization of a densely-populated locality.

In those bygone days the Lake of Galilee was almost encircled by an unbroken line of cities and villages, and, according to Josephus, many of those villages could boast of ten thousand or more inhabitants, and, as one writer has remarked: "Galilee was the hub of the wheel of civilization and art, and the centre of a population that staggers our realization." On the shores of that historic inland sea, there were nine or ten cities, and here let us step aside to make some brief reference to those once busy lake towns. Tiberias was the most famous of them, and at the time of Christ it was quite a modern town, having been built by Herod Antipas, who out of admiration or flattery for the Emperor Tiberius called it after this illustrious Roman. Strange as it may seem, our blessed Lord never actually visited Tiberias, and this may be accounted for by the fact that to make this spot "habitable was to transgress the Jewish ancient laws, because many sepulchres were to be taken away in order to make room for the city of Tiberias," and in consequence Jesus would avoid such a place, lest He became under the Jewish law ceremonially unclean. After the destruction of Jerusalem, the city of Tiberias with its magnificent palace, many public buildings, and its famous medicinal springs, became the great resort of the Jews, and the center of rabbinical learning.

Already we have spoken about Capharnaum, Christ's "own city," which stood on the beautiful shores of Genesareth, and which was a prosperous cosmopolitan settlement.

Then there was the ancient and busy town of Tarichaea, or "Pickling Town," a great fish-curing



port. This had boats enough to meet the Romans, a generation later, in a deadly sea-fight on the lake, during which encounter there was a terrible slaughter, and Tarichaea was the naval station during those wars. This sea-faring center, along with Tiberias, was a very good market for the fishing industry of the district. Another thriving town was Magdala, which tradition has long associated with Mary the Sinner, from whom our Divine Saviour had cast out seven devils.

There was also Corozain, in which Christ worked many miracles, and which, in consequence of its people turning a deaf ear to the voice of God, was denounced by Jesus. This doomed city became a mass of ruins, and so utterly was it demolished that it is now difficult even to locate its exact site.

We now come to the much-disputed city of Bethsaida, which was probably on the western shore of the lake, south of Capernaum.

Its name signifies "House of Fish." It was the native-place of Peter and Andrew, Philip, James and John. It was the frequent scene of our Lord's preaching and miracles, but eventually it suffered the same doom as Corozain, for it likewise incurred the condemnation of Jesus.

What still further enhanced the Sea of Galilee's claim to distinction and historic importance, was the fact that it was crowded with all kinds of shipping, Roman galleys, pleasure boats of Roman nobles, and fishing smacks of the country folk. It was graced by all styles of barks, while Herod had there a formidable fleet to keep watch upon its busy waters. "Battles were fought there, which shocked all nations with their consequences, and upon those sea-fights looked Vespa-sian, and Titus, and Trajan, and whole empires." It was to this very heart of civilization, then, that Jesus



came with His timely message of Redemption, He came to fill it with encouragement and hope, to soothe its sorrows and bind up its wounds, to preach forgiveness and to proffer pardon, to attend to its bodily needs and ailments, to cure its diseases and its maladies, to emancipate the enslaved, to uplift its down-trodden, to elevate its womanhood and to restore life to the dead.

One evening, after a strenuous and fatiguing day's preaching to the multitude in the neighborhood of Capharnaum, Christ dismissed the people and bade His disciples to "go over to the other side of the lake. And they launched forth" (Luke viii. 22).

It appears that Christ had been teaching the whole day through, and you know how wearying and exhausting it must have been for Him to go on instructing hour after hour, addressing people whose hearts were hardened and obdurate. Settling down exhausted in the stern of the boat, Jesus, with His head on a pillow, perhaps improvised out of a fisherman's coat, fell sound asleep.

Soon a change came in the weather, the clouds began to gather, the wind became violent, and the terrors of a hurricane and intense darkness overtook them with rapid strides.

Caught in this sudden fury, the waves dashing to such a height that the boat no longer was under control, amidst blinding torrents of rain and with the sea breaking over the sides, and in serious danger of capsizing, the terrified disciples awoke their divine Master, and amid the howling hurricane they cried out: "Lord save us, we perish. And Jesus said to them: Why are you fearful, O ye of little faith?" Then, as He arose and looked out upon the storm, He bade the wind to cease and commanded the infuriated waves to be still.



In that violent storm, our blessed Lord reproached the disciples, asking them: "Why are you fearful?" And yet, my Brethren, was there not sound cause for fear and alarm? Was not death apparently upon them? And yet again, was not Jesus, the Son of God, with them; He who had power over life and death, He whom no danger could surprise nor calamity overtake? Evidently they did not doubt that His power to rescue them had failed: in Him are all their thoughts of safety: "Lord, save us, we perish." Such was their anxiety and such was their cry, and yet, should not those disciples have realized that in the company of the All-Powerful One, there was no need for anxiety?

Let us all take from this incident the lesson to avoid undue anxiety, the anxiety, namely, that has its source in a lack of faith and of confidence in Almighty God.

It is by the Providence of God that we should promote the well-being and the well-doing of society by certain various means; but anxiety does not furnish those means, nor make them efficient or advantageous.

Business does not prosper, plans do not succeed, difficulties are not overcome, responsibilities are not lightened or dispelled, unpleasantnesses or misunderstandings are not remedied, health and digestion are not made perfect, nor are the dead restored, by anxiety.

Sleep is not secured, neuralgia is not banished, a fractured limb is not put right, a plague is not put to flight, bad trade is not rectified, debts are not paid, and discords do not turn into harmony, by anxiety, worry and concern.

Undue anxiety contributes nothing to prayer—no melody to praise—no incense to thanksgiving—no joy to adoration—and no glory to the Almighty. It brings no aid in seeking God, no peace of conscience after



a fall—no spiritual consolation in the hour of trial, and no satisfaction in spiritual dilemmas. To be anxious and without confidence in God is to creep as a worm, when you might soar aloft as an eagle; it is to crawl as a cripple, when you might run as a racer; it is to make yourself faint-hearted and weary, when you might be valiant and persevering; it is to despair, when you might be courageous; and it is to make bitter what might be sweet, and to darken what might be lightsome. Yet how prevalent is false anxiety, and how disastrous its influence!

Look what an employee has to experience and put up with in the case of an over-anxious master. The man is doing his best—his very utmost—but nothing is right in the estimation or verdict of the employer. And why is this?

Not because the master is of a bad disposition; not because of his over-exacting mind; and not because he is an ill-tempered person; but anxiety makes the man mad, and he really does not know how he is managing his business because of his distracted mind, and because of his disquieted temperament.

It is often enough the same in families. Some children never see sunshine in their parents' faces—the mother's face always cheerless, the father's face invariably gloomy. It is very often needless anxiety and useless worry; and the children grow up disliking home, and ever ready to get away from it as soon as they can. The lads grow up, and they want to spend the evenings away from home, just because the home is filled with a sort of November fog—apprehension and dejection. Of course I do not refer to the apprehension and anxiety that have their source in the illness of loved ones, or in other adversities, and that are not due to a lack of confidence in God. I mean, for instance, the



overanxious wife, who causes an everlasting pall of gloom to hover over the household; the pessimistic man, whose family are apt to become victims of melancholia and discontent.

We all are placed in a vale of tears, of responsibility, sorrow, and tribulation; we all have to face the vagaries, the vicissitudes, and the ups and downs of life; and though tempests may sweep across our path, though anguish of spirit may set in like a heavy cloud, and perplexity and wavering may make us feel discontented and despondent, yet we must be prompt to realize, and swift to seek, the help of the Almighty, Who is ever at our beck and call, especially when our life threatens to become an enigma or a Calvary.

In moments of spiritual darkness, in moments of sad unrest, in moments of desolation and despair, in moments when life seems useless and void, in moments of apparent abandonment and agony, and in moments when the struggle and the hope for the life beyond appear futile and beset with insurmountable difficulties, remember that God is still on high, and will never forsake you, so long as you have courage and confidence in Him. Cease not then your trust in His Divine aid, even though you cry, with a child-like cry: "Lord, save us, we perish."

Though tempests roar, though gloom hover round, though sorrows and trials seem to overwhelm you, and though misfortune and every evil come sweeping over you, and about to engulf you, place your trust and your all in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In spirit go back and behold the Master sleeping in the boat, and see in that holy Face the story of sorrow, weariness, and suffering, and as you gaze upon that noble and Divine Countenance, remember that He became Man and therefore has a human heart and hu-



man sympathies, and how He in His infinite sufferings sought relief and consolation in prayer. *Ecce Homo—Behold the Man!* And when you want courage in the conflict of life, when you need some one to beat down your enemies, when you want faith to see in life's struggle the Will of God, then behold your God in all His omnipotence calming the threatening elements. He will surely come to your aid if with firm confidence you cry out to Him: "Lord, save us, we perish."



## XVI. The Healing of the Demoniac

AFTER commanding the storm to cease, our Lord and His disciples proceeded to the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. They landed in "the country of the Gerasens which is over against Galilee" (Luke viii. 26), in the locality of Gergesa, now known as Chersa, which is in the district of Decapolis that lies to the east and south of the Lake. Decapolis was the name given to the group of ten cities occupying a certain area on the east bank of the Jordan, and while it is only mentioned three times in the New Testament, ancient historians make frequent reference to it.

At the time of Christ the district was inhabited by Greek colonists, most of whom, if not all, were pagans, and it seems to have been a great center of commerce, civilization, and culture, and its influence was as far-reaching as it was far-famed. Our blessed Lord often visited those parts, and He became so well known among the inhabitants that "they presented to Him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and such as were possessed by devils, and lunatics, and those that had the palsy, and He cured them" (Matt. iv. 24). That "great and wide" region of Decapolis, though for the most part a Hellenic settlement, was immediately subject to Rome, and was favored by the government with various privileges.

It would be futile to enumerate the cities composing the Decapolis, as historians do not agree on them; moreover the title for the district was still preserved



even after additional cities became included. Its most important city was Scythopolis. To-day all of these cities, with the exception of Damascus, are in ruins, but these ruins testify to the remarkable genius and progress of the people who once dwelt there.

It is interesting to note that our Blessed Saviour gave those pagan people the opportunity of hearing of the Kingdom of God, but as events showed they rejected the grace proffered to them.

When Christ had landed on shore on this occasion He was accosted by two men who were possessed by devils, and it seems they were conscious of their diabolic condition.

St. Matthew in his Gospel mentions two demoniacs, while both St. Luke and St. Mark refer to one only, but as this is not the occasion for inquiring into the cause of this discrepancy, we shall content ourselves with following the account which is the most detailed. At any rate, we can safely assume that one of the demoniacs dropped into the background, and let the other do all the talking and we can then follow the account given by St. Mark, who, in his characteristic style, gives those graphic touches which enhance the vivid reality of the episode. This demoniac, one of the most alarming and dangerous type, had been the terror of the whole countryside, and he was so violent and possessed of such extraordinary muscular strength, which is often the case with maniacs, that all human efforts to keep him under restraint had proved hopelessly ineffective, for "he had burst the chains and broken the fetters in pieces, and no one could tame him" (Mark v. 4). So ferocious and utterly irresponsible had he become that it was positively unsafe and decidedly unwise for any one to cross his path, in fact, "none could pass by that way," when he was on his rambles.



Day and night he roamed about the mountains, wandering aimlessly hither and thither, rending the air with his fierce howls and fiendish shrieks, giving vent to his frenzy by cutting himself with sharp stones. He had discarded all clothing, and when he sought or needed rest he took up his abode "in the tombs," thus frequenting places which were unclean under the law, on account of the dead men's bones which were there.

As this is one of the most striking instances of demoniacal possession recorded by the evangelists, it would be well if we paused to devote a little time to the consideration and description of this terrible affliction. Some critics have untenably asserted that the cases of possession, as found in the Gospels, are to be taken as symbolical; in other words, they are to be understood as representing the prevalence of evil in the world, while "the casting out of the demons by Christ merely means His victory over that evil by His doctrine and life." Some have maintained that these unfortunate victims were comparable to those persons whom to-day we know as insane, epileptic, melancholic, or mentally unhinged.

However, it is very noteworthy that in the Gospels, whenever a case is cited of demoniacal possession, it is carefully distinguished in the narrative from other and ordinary types of disease and suffering.

Here let me summon the evidence of St. Matthew, who makes this distinction very pronounced, in stating that Jesus healed "all manner of sickness and every infirmity among the people. . . . and they presented to Him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and *such as were possessed by devils*, and those that had the palsy, and He cured them" (Matt. v, 23, 24). Surely the Gospel testimony is not reconcilable with any other hypothesis or



interpretation, unless objectors are going to assume that the evangelists wrote one thing and really meant something else. Then again to employ such unmistakable language as the one just cited, which obviously branded some unfortunate wretches as being the victims of satanic possession, would have been a gross libel, and even to suggest, much less wish to confirm in the minds of others the existence of such a hideous affliction, would indeed have been unpardonable. Such a statement would be devoid of, and foreign to, all veracity.

It is also apparent how differently our Blessed Saviour dealt with those who were possessed, compared with those who were merely suffering from other diseases. In the former case, He invariably addressed the *evil spirit* as distinct from and opposed to the man himself; whereas in any other type of ailment or visitation, He simply and clearly announced that the person was cured, or He contented Himself with addressing directly the person who was sick or suffering, or made some application to the organ affected. Moreover, we have the testimony of the Jews themselves, who saw no inconsistency in believing in satanic possession; and finally, Christ Himself taught that there was such a thing, for did He not give His Apostles authority and power to cast out devils, and even warned them of its difficult accomplishment in some cases, in which event they were to have recourse to "prayer and fasting"? Of course there is the definite teaching of the Church binding for us in this matter, and she leaves no room for doubt or speculation as to its reality.

Now we come to consider what precisely was this possession.

At all events, it was not concerned with the moral character of the poor victim himself, who was not nec-



essarily a wicked and sinful man, as it was rather a case for cure than for conversion.

Some have suggested that moral depravity, especially in the form of gross persistent sensuality, prepared the way for the entrance of a demon into a man, but there is no satisfactory or convincing evidence to sanction such an opinion. Then again, we must not confuse possession with the desperate plight of Judas, into whom, we read, "Satan entered," for this condition implied that the vile traitor had voluntarily given himself up to do the will of the Evil One, in other words his state was imputable to his own acts; therefore he was deserving of punishment; whereas the misdeemeanors and the ravings of the ill-fated demoniac were such as to arouse compassion, rather than condemnation. The distinctive feature of this terrible affliction of possession was that the devil, with God's permission, actually occupied the body of the man, and so influenced him that he spoke and acted as the agent of the satanic instigator.

Of course the soul itself was not, and never could be possessed, nor be deprived of its free will, though its ordinary control over the members of the body was hindered by the overruling diabolic power, of whose presence the unfortunate man was quite aware.

He was driven hither and thither by the might and the malignity of the demon, but he felt and knew himself to be so driven; therefore, he was utterly miserable, abhorring himself, and inflicting all manner of evil upon himself.

It was a hapless individual of this type, who, accompanied by a fellow victim, rushed down to meet our Lord, as He landed, probably in the early morning, after the rough passage of the previous night. Evidently this fiend must have noticed the approach



of Jesus, and, whether through hostile intent or because he felt himself irresistibly drawn to his Saviour this much is quite certain, that he was the first to meet our Lord as He set foot on shore. Whatever may have been his purpose in encountering the Lord, at once he flung himself at the feet of Jesus in an attitude of worship, which presently manifested itself in language that attested to the power and majesty of our Saviour. With a loud voice, that not only proclaimed his own fear and his own agitation, but which also revealed the influence of the demons within him, he entreated the Holy One of God not to torment him before the time. This expression, "before the time," made it evident that the evil spirits realized they would be eventually confined to hell, where they would suffer more intensely.

Here I must recall the exact words of the demoniac, as they evince the fact that the demons themselves recognized that Jesus was the Son of God; for they made their unfortunate victim ask: "What have I to do with Thee, Jesus, THOU SON OF THE MOST HIGH GOD?"

From quite early times the title "*the Most High*," invariably applied to God Himself, and since it was included in the formula of exorcism, for the Evil One was expelled "in the name of the Most High," it was naturally enough a rather familiar expression with Satan and his wicked satellites.

Instead of paying any heed to the request of the demons, when they besought Him not to consign them to their proper and final doom, Jesus proceeded to ask the man his name. This question on our Lord's part may have been just to humble the evil spirits or it may have been to produce a soberizing effect on the unfortunate victim, for it is well known that to recall a



maniac's attention to his name, to awaken his memory, to touch his sympathies by past association, often produces a lucid interval. But the evil tormentors still retained their power over the man, as is seen by their mysterious answer, for they told Jesus that their name was "*Legion.*" The reply meant to convey the fact that a large number of spirits were in possession. Now followed another appeal by the demons in which they besought Christ not to drive them out of the country, and not to cast them into the deep, but to permit them to take up their abode in a herd of swine, which was feeding on the mountain side. Their request was granted and entering into the swine, the whole herd rushed headlong down the slope into the lake and were drowned. Forthwith the demoniac was healed.

The frightened keepers of the herd, when they saw the swine run into the Lake and perish therein, fled into the city, and at once the story of the miracle went from tongue to tongue, until the whole countryside was in consternation and alarm, and forthwith they hurried off to see the wonderful Visitor, who had come into their midst.

When the Gergesenes found Jesus, and saw that the man out of whom the devils were departed, was sitting at His feet, clothed and in his right mind—that man who had been so exceedingly fierce that they had bound him with chains and fetters, and so exceedingly strong that the chains had been burst asunder by him, that madman who had dwelt in the mountains and among the tombs, that poor wretch who howled and cut himself with stones—when the Gergesenes, I say, saw that man in his right mind sitting at the feet of Jesus and clothed, why, surely, wonder, joy, and gratitude should have filled their minds. And when, on the other hand, they saw that, by the exercise of the same



power which had cast out the devils and had healed the man, the swine had been maddened and destroyed, surely wonder, fear, and belief in the Divinity of Christ should have filled their minds.

Alas, such was not the case, for they besought Jesus that He should leave them, that He should work no more of these works of mercy, deliver no more of these victims of Satan's hate. They beheld the mad-man sane and the swine gone; but they thought more of the swine than of the man. They were more sensible of their losses than of their gain; they were more filled with dread than with gratitude.

They chose rather to be content with devils whom they knew, than with the presence of God whom they feared; and they were taken at their word, for Jesus shortly departed from them.

Turning now from the Gospel story, let us take to heart a serious and timely lesson, which this particular incident suggests to our consideration. Though demoniacal possession such as here recorded is not of frequent occurrence to-day, yet in other ways the dominion of Satan still holds sway over the souls of men, for he is ever working havoc amongst a certain type of misguided and mystery-mongers who invoke and receive actual manifestations of his presence.

Satan has in our days another and much more insidious way of wrecking the human mind and body. I refer to those deluded beings, who have become victims of the modern craze for Spiritism. The rapid, reckless and devastating spread of this satanic cult is one of the most appalling but unmistakable symptoms that the mentality of a proportion of the people of our times is seriously affected, for no sane person, no matter whether it be through bereavement, curiosity or superstition, would care to trifle or tamper with



things, the consequences of which spell moral depravity and physical ruin, loss of mental equilibrium, and a likelihood of ending one's days as an inmate of an asylum. For mere mortals to persuade themselves that they can force the gates of death, for any man to tell us that the curtain between the visible and the invisible world can be pulled aside, and that he can peer into the unknown, and describe to us the details and the delights of the world beyond, is to defy the words of Sacred Writ, which tell us that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive what things God hath prepared for them that love Him" (I Cor. ii. 9).

Spiritism, or Spiritualism, as it is sometimes incorrectly called, is the belief that man is able of his own free will to communicate with departed spirits, by putting questions to and receiving answers from them at séances, by means of spirit rapping, writing, and by living mediums. Much of this spiritistic stuff is interwoven with fraud, charlatanism and deceit, but there remains a certain quota or indisputable residue of objective phenomena, which cannot be gainsaid or explained away as jugglery or nonsense, and therefore some of it must be regarded as reality of a serious nature.

The Church during her wide experience of some two thousand years, has accumulated a vast store of knowledge and information which should be put at a higher premium than the platform utterances or the press publications of the modern advocates of spiritism.

Acting on this deposit of experience, she points out that, attempting to hold communication with departed spirits in any way whatsoever, to attend séances, even out of curiosity, or for the purpose of evoking or con-



sulting the spirits, is mortally sinful, and is beset with manifold dangers both to soul and body. Who would venture to record the number of those who have been mentally unbalanced, and have ended their days in a mad-house by dabbling with spiritism? "Ten thousand people are at present confined in lunatic asylums on account of having tampered with the preternatural," such is the verdict of an eminent doctor.

Nowadays the theory is gaining ground that many of the inmates of our lunatic establishments are nothing more or less than cases of possession. Hence, my Brethren, I beg of you in the name of God, of His Holy Church, and of common sense, no matter what others may do or say, I beseech you to abide by the Holy Will of God, by the teaching of the Church, and by the findings of sound judgment, and refrain from taking part in any of these diabolic practices.

Finally, I caution you, I conjure you, nay more, going further, I command you not to surrender the key to the citadel of your soul, and not to destroy your passport to the heavenly city. Thus if you are beset by discontent, despondency, and despair, and when sorrow, pain, bereavement, and temptation seem to be compassing you on every side, do as all Godfearing souls do, go to church, fall on your knees, speak to Jesus in the Sacrament of His Love, tell Him all that is wrong, and ask Him to come to your rescue. Your prayer will be heard, if you offer it from a sincerely repentant heart. But flee those who would persuade you to communicate with the wicked spirits who roam through the world seeking the ruin of souls.



## XVII. The Multiplication of the Loaves

THE constant missionary activities amongst the people, and consequent need of bodily and spiritual refreshment, rendered it both expedient and necessary that Jesus and His little company should for a while seek retirement from the increasing pressure by the people. The hard work, the poor fare, the tedious journeyings, and incessant cares of the apostles necessitated a rest, and thus it was that Jesus said to them: "Come apart into a desert place, and rest a little." On the north-east shore of Lake Galilee, just beyond where the Jordan enters it, there was a flourishing town, by name Bethsaida, or "House of Fish," which early in the reign of Philip, the Tetrarch of Iturea, was advanced to the rank of a city, and became known as Bethsaida Julias, in honor of Julia, the beautiful but impious daughter of Augustus, the Emperor of Rome. On the outskirts of the town, and stretching in an easterly direction, there was a level tract of moorland, forming a triangle, whose three sides were respectively bordered by the northern shore of the lake, the river bank, and a mountain range; to-day the plain is called Butaiha.

This plain was referred to by the evangelist as a "desert place," but this must not lead one to think that that it was a dreary and barren wilderness. We read that "there was much grass in the place," and it was styled a desert merely because it was an uninhabited and lonely spot. The locality was accessible by boat, and it was also within easy reach of the neigh-



boring towns, yet as it was a solitary part of the country, it formed a suitable place for retirement and rest. It was thither that Jesus and the Twelve after the return from their opening mission went by boat, and their departure was witnessed by a large number of people, who had been attracted to our Saviour by His many miracles. The purpose of the voyage was to seek repose, but this end was entirely frustrated, for no sooner had the multitude seen the boat put off, than they watched its direction; then, finding that it was steering for the vicinity of Bethsaida, they likewise set off for the same spot. Losing no time on their journey, some actually anticipated the arrival of Jesus, and were waiting on the shore when the boat arrived. In addition to the inhabitants of the neighboring villages, there was quite a considerable number of pilgrims, who were on their way to Jerusalem for the Pasch, and who, also, it seems, had been attracted by the personality and fame of the Divine Wonder-worker.

His plan for a quiet and secluded spell was thus completely defeated, for the sight of the vast and eager throng, which showed by their presence and attachment that they were like to sheep without a shepherd, at once made an irresistible appeal to our Lord's compassionate Heart.

The pitiable condition and privation of most of these people, their spiritual destitution, and pathetic appearance touched the gentle soul of Jesus, who with His disciples ascended the hill in the immediate vicinity, and there remained until the multitude had settled down round them. Forgetful of His weariness and His much needed rest, and being only intent on using to their spiritual advantage the favorable state of mind of these thousands of people, our dear and loving Lord



began to speak to them, in strong yet simple words, about the duties, the burdens, and the purpose of this life; and He also "spoke to them of the Kingdom of God," and, what added power and authority to His address, was His attention to the sick whom He healed.

The day wore on through the long hours of strain and effort, but the company showed no signs of dispersing, and ere long the evening would be upon them. Yet these eager throngs who had come without the necessities of life, and therefore must have experienced hunger and fatigue, seemed to have become quite oblivious, if not indifferent, to the demands of their famished and, in some cases, exhausted condition.

There was no village near, the place was devoid of all human habitation. To accommodate and satisfy the needs of such a large crowd of people seemed totally out of the question; for how could they obtain food at such an untimely hour and in such a place? The disciples began to get anxious, indeed they could not help feeling concerned and even alarmed; the situation was becoming tense, it might become critical; a hungry mob might get out of control; furthermore, these ardent admirers of their Master might through distress become His embittered and implacable enemies.

To add to this invidious prospect was the probability that an uproar amongst these people would afford a welcome opportunity to the adversaries of their Lord. In order to forestall these undesired and alarming consequences, and desiring to avoid any harm to their Master, the disciples called the attention of Jesus to the late hour, and urged him to dismiss the people, so that they might go and seek food for themselves.

Imagine the astonishment, however, of the apostles



when, instead of giving orders for the dismissal of the crowd, their Master ordered that they should be fed.

As they stood there knowing not what to do or say, for they were completely bewildered at such an impossible request, Jesus turned to Philip and asked: "Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?"

Why our Lord addressed this remark to Philip is not known, but several suggestions are offered which it will not be futile to cite.

Some think that Philip was especially singled out, because, being a native of those parts, he might know how to obtain supplies; or, rather, how impossible it was to obtain them; whereas others have endeavored to explain it by suggesting that he was close at hand when our Saviour made the inquiry. It has been further suggested that Philip was of a rather calculating and cautious frame of mind, and so he was being tested in his faith.

At any rate, whatever the reason may have been, this much is quite certain, that our Lord did not ask the question as needing any counsel, "for He Himself knew what He would do." Philip's reply that a large quantity of provisions would be required to satisfy so many hungry people showed that he did not anticipate any miraculous intervention; and, like one bewildered, he assured Jesus that "200 pennyworth of bread," which in modern currency would be a large sum of money, would not be enough.

No sooner had the hopelessness of the situation been thus stated to our Lord than He asked: "How many loaves have you? Go and see," and after making inquiries Andrew reported that there was a lad there, who had five barley loaves and two fishes, but what, he added, were these amongst so many? Certainly not much, but later events proved that in the



hands of the God-Man they were more than enough for the famished thousands.

The people were bidden to sit down; accordingly the people arranged themselves in companies of fifties and hundreds, the sight reminding St. Peter long after, on account of the bright colors of the Eastern costumes, of the flower-beds of a great garden.

Then Jesus, taking the barley cakes into His venerable and holy hands, raised His eyes to heaven, gave thanks, blessed the loaves, broke them into pieces, and gave them to the disciples to distribute amongst the multitude; and He did the same with the fishes, which were shared among the vast assemblage.

Not only did Christ feed and satisfy the people, but He did it in abundant fashion, for when all had eaten, there were enough remnants to fill twelve baskets, thus there was more left over than there had been at the outset. This stupendous miracle not only overawed the crowd, but resulted in a keen appreciation of their kind Benefactor, and in their great joy and excitement they shouted out: "This is the prophet indeed, that is come into the world" (John, vi. 14).

This profound and remarkable admiration, unfortunately, was not due to their spiritual discernment, but to their mistaken notion regarding the promised Messiah, whom they expected to come with all the power and pomp of an earthly ruler. In their excited enthusiasm, they felt convinced that Christ was the Prophet—the Messiah, and then and there, they wanted to proclaim Him as King, and no doubt, they would have escorted Him to Jerusalem, to enthrone Him as their King and Messiah, because He appealed to them as the very ideal of a mighty ruler, which was their conception of the Messiah.

At once He recognized their mistaken and danger-



ous enthusiasm; indeed it seems that even the apostles shared somewhat this worldly and perilous design, so without delay He dismissed the Twelve, bidding them to cross the lake and go at once to the town of Capharnaum.

After He had dispatched the apostles, He forthwith exhorted the multitude to return to their homes, while He Himself sought retreat in the solitude of the mountains.

The next day the multitude, still keenly enthusiastic and certainly full of curiosity, fancied that Jesus was somewhere in the vicinity, and accordingly they made diligent search and inquiries, and this proving futile, "they took shipping, and came to Capharnaum, seeking for Jesus," Whom they eventually found on His way to the synagogue. As soon as they found Him, they expressed their astonishment, saying: "Rabbi, when camest Thou hither?"

Realizing how utterly worldly and materialistic was their outlook, Christ paid no heed to their question, and being determined not to enter into any irrelevant conversation with these self-centred and self-seeking admirers, He began His discourse on the Eucharistic Banquet.

He began by upbraiding them for seeking Him because they had enjoyed a miraculous repast, because they thought that having received something good, they might get something even better. Loaves and fishes were what He had given them, and now they sought and hankered after other earthly goods, but He at once pointed out their false notion respecting Himself by urging them to "labor not for the meat which perisheth," but to seek the food of the soul, which secured life everlasting, and which He, the Son of Man, would give them. Evidently they felt somewhat



ashamed, for they asked Him: "What shall we do that we may work the works of God?"

To convince them of His Divine Authority they demanded something more astounding than even the miracle of the previous day, reminding our Lord that Moses had given them manna, and as yet He had only given them loaves and fishes, thus hinting that, if He wished to justify His claims that "God the Father sealed" Him, He must give them a greater proof of His Divinity, Power, and Personality. Why did He not "rain bread from heaven," or something better still, and thus give an incontestable sign of His Divinity?

In response to their challenge, He pointed out that it was not Moses but God who had rained down the manna in the desert, which after all was only food for the body, but He would give them food which, if they eat it, would give them life eternal, and this food was not the food of the perishable body, but the food of the immortal soul.

But still their thoughts were material and worldly, and in their delight at the glorious prospect of being actually immortal they eagerly clamored for this celestial bread which would produce unending life. Our Lord then told them that the food, the bread, which He was going to give them, was His Flesh for the life of the world. Here then was the definite and sublime promise of the Eucharistic Bread, a promise which He fulfilled at the Last Supper by instituting the Holy Eucharist.

So startling and so singular was this announcement or doctrine, that His hearers were completely dumbfounded, and in their consternation they made it quite evident that they could not believe such an impossible statement. Whereupon Jesus reprimanded the mur-



murders, and repeated His prediction, assuring them that He was "the living bread which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world" (John, vi. 51, 52).

The Jews refused to accept such an apparently unreasonable and revolting idea, and in their utter amazement and supreme contempt for this unheard-of contention, they stood aghast, and after skeptical conversation amongst themselves evinced their disapproval and scorn by the incredulous remark: "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" (John vi. 53.)

The people thought that this statement of our Divine Lord was putting too great a tax on one's faith. Forsooth, how could any sane person accept such a stupendous assertion? It surpassed all understanding, why, it was blasphemy pure and simple, for it was nothing else but a claim to be God! Such were the opinions which found expression in the retort: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

But then followed in language even more emphatic and unmistakable the further confirmation of Christ's doctrine, a confirmation that indeed contained a condemnation of those who refused to accept His words, for our Lord said: "Amen, amen, I say unto you: Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath everlasting life and I will raise him up in the last day" (John, vi. 54, 55).

Now, if the people had misunderstood our Lord in taking His words in their literal sense, would He not have enlightened them by saying: "You have misunderstood Me, because I never meant to convey the idea that I really intended to give you My Flesh to eat



and My Blood to drink. I meant simply a figure, a mere representation of My body, a symbol, or a sign''? And so He would have explained the difficulty away, but He proffered no explanation, nor was there need of one, because they had correctly understood, and to give no room for doubt He condemned all those who should fail to take the words He had pronounced in their strict, literal sense. He had promised to give His Flesh to eat, and His Blood to drink, in other words the Holy Eucharist, and since He, who made the promise was God, it must be true.

If any one were to ask what is the most sacred, the most solemn, the most marvelous and the most consoling dogma of our religion—the one by which God has gathered together and bestowed on us the richest of His graces—by which our life on earth is brought nearest to Heaven, and in closest touch with God, there is no doubt that we would answer: "It is the Holy Eucharist."

"I am the living bread, which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give, is my flesh for the life of the world" (John, vi. 51, 52). Oh, what blessed words for the weary and burdened soul traveling life's journey, conscious of the difficulties that beset the way, borne down by the weight and the cares of a laborious and trying existence!

Oh, the welcome words to the penitent sinner, as they assure him of God's aid and pardon, and inspire him with the hope of a brighter and better future, a future to be spent and enjoyed in the presence of an all-loving God! Welcome words, indeed, to the doubting and harassed heart, bestowing confidence, assurance and peace!

Welcome words of encouragement to the strong



man battling against temptation and sin, and struggling bravely and faithfully wherever God has placed him! Welcome words to the weak and frail woman, called to submission and sacrifice, scarce knowing sometimes how to discharge her duties, how to attend to the wants and the care of her little ones, and perhaps tortured with worry and pain! Welcome words! yes, welcome words to all and to each of us!

The very sound of these words is refreshing. They invigorate and promise help from on high, for they assure us of the grace that God offers freely, fully and without stint. "I am the bread of life. He that eateth this bread will live for ever." It is a grand promise of Divine nourishment. Who will not hasten to accept it? Come and partake of the "Bread of Life."

If the sense of your guilt keeps you back, let the offer and the invitation be your plea, and for His sake draw near and eat His flesh and drink His blood. Then you will feel the power of a new-born life enter into you, flow through your veins, nerve your whole nature, and, like a giant refreshed, you will burst the bonds of evil habits which have kept you captive; you will slay the foes of your salvation which once daunted you, and by the power of God's own Spirit infused into your soul you will be made to rejoice in a foretaste of Heaven.

No matter what you are, good or bad, careless or neglectful, weak or strong, learned or ignorant, sinner or saint, it matters not. Jesus offers you the "Bread of Life"; class, character and caste count for naught when He calls you. Do not say that "I am not good enough, I am not worthy, He doesn't want a sinner like me to come and eat at His banquet." Such notions are the promptings of the Evil One, who wants you to stay away, and famish—come then, hungering and thirsting



for the Divine nourishment; come wishing to become better; come, penitent, believing, and confident, come and be fed.

Do not say: "I am impure, and stained with lust and vice, and so I cannot come." Even so, supposing what you say is but too true, the "Bread of Life" is not refused to the truly repentant sinner—above all it is needed by him, whose passions are strong and fierce, for it contains a special virtue for purifying the fallen and degraded man.

"It is," says Albert the Great, "as natural for the Flesh of Christ to quench the ardors of evil concupiscence as it is for water to extinguish fire," forsooth if a soul enslaved by vice is to be changed and cured, it must feed on "the Bread of Life."

O, wanderers in the barren wilderness of life, will you perish for want of spiritual food, when the Bread of God is at hand? O sojourners in this vale of tears, will you feed on the sinful husks of swine, when Christ will give you His sublime Flesh to eat? O hungry wayfarers, will you starve your soul when there is Divine Food at hand?

Outside the door of pardon is death and damnation; outside the reach of Jesus's invitation there is no hope; outside the Eucharistic Banquet there is perdition of the soul. A poor woman was once asked by a neighbor what good she got by receiving the Holy Eucharist. "Do you understand it?" asked the neighbor. "No," said the woman, "I cannot understand it, I cannot explain it; but this I do know, that I go to the altar empty and I come back full of grace."

Whence can all be satisfied and strengthened with food here in the wilderness of this life, full of dangers for the soul? I point to the tabernacle there, and there is the answer!



## XVIII. The Great Confession—the Great Commission

In the history of Christ one cannot fail to observe how scanty is our knowledge of the first thirty years of His life which He spent quietly in the privacy of His foster-father's home. But how crowded becomes the story of the next two years, while during the last year of His life on earth the sacred narrative assumes huge and momentous proportions. At the particular period of our Lord's earthly sojourn which we are about to review, we are entering upon the final stages; for events were hurrying on to the final crisis in our Saviour's ministry.

In this the last year of His working and teaching, Christ had forborne to attend the Feast of the Pass-over at Jerusalem, not because He wished to be understood as disregarding the religious precept concerning this sacred rite, but to avoid the Jews who sought to kill Him, and because His hour had not yet come.

Therefore, instead of journeying to the Holy City, He spent His time and energies in extending His labors amongst the heathens, thus showing that His loving kindness and saving mercy were to be vouchsafed to Gentile and Jew alike.

After sojourning in Galilee for a while, we find that Christ with His disciples went to the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and there it was, and on that occasion, that the daughter of the Syro-Phenician woman was freed from the evil spirit, which had been tormenting her.

Returning He traveled through the district of the Decapolis, and whilst in those parts, He healed the



man who was deaf and dumb. There too, He fed, for the second time, in a miraculous manner a great multitude of some thousands, who had been attracted by His marvelous personality and powers. Dismissing the crowd, He retired to Dalmanutha, a small village situated among the hills between Tiberias and Magdala. But Christ sought retirement and rest in vain, for His enemies, discovering His whereabouts, came and pestered Him for a sign which would prove His Messianic mission, but Jesus, knowing their thoughts, refused to accede to their insidious request.

Accordingly, He departed for Bethsaida, and, staying there a while, healed the blind man. And so northward He continued, passing through various towns and villages, till at last He reached Caesarea Philippi. This city was an inland city on the utmost northern extremity of the Holy Land, nestling in a quiet recess at the base of Mt. Hermon.

Hither, then, into peaceful retirement, undisturbed by the crowds of Galilee, were the disciples led by our Lord, that He might reveal to them the great truth of His Divinity, a truth only hinted at before.

Until this time, the apostles had witnessed their beloved Master in the rôle of Prophet, Teacher, Miracle-worker, and Benefactor, gathering around Himself disciples, unfolding to them His purpose, and His power to effect that purpose; disclosing to them some of the mysteries of His Kingdom, and establishing in the disciples by manifestations of His omnipotence and glory a sort of personal confidence and loyalty.

Henceforth they were to learn that His life's work was to be fulfilled by His own sufferings and death, for these were the divine means whereby He was to accomplish His Heavenly Father's designs.

They were about to discover what were the steps



which would lead this strange King to His triumph and throne; that it was not over the bodies of slain foes and conquered enemies, not by hurling the proud Roman from his place of power, that He intended to establish His rule and dynasty; but that it was by the actual sacrifice of His life, to save fallen humanity from the wrath of an offended God, that He would win the greatest of victories, a victory which Heaven would sanction and which time could not efface. His Death and Resurrection were the divinely-appointed means of His triumph over the powers of darkness, and at the same time they would be the confirmation of His Divinity. Though absolutely conscious of His own Godhead, Jesus had never up to this discussed with the Twelve this all-important and essential attribute and claim, but as they were to be His successors in the work of saving souls, it became necessary that they should know and grasp the precise nature of His person, mission and dignity. He had to reveal Himself as the Messiah, establish His divine identity, and then demand their formal recognition and unqualified acceptance of His claim, a claim unique and ideally sublime.

The conception of Jesus regarding Himself and His Messianic Kingdom was utterly different from the conceptions of the apostles, who cherished the idea and the desire that their Master would be a political and national potentate, and would found and spread an earthly empire.

One might be tempted to ask why Christ did not give an unmistakable and definite manifestation of His Personality and Mission at the very outset of His active ministry, especially when all the world was yearning and looking out for the long-promised Messiah.



In answer to this, I would say that if at the beginning of His missionary labors He had put Himself forward as the Messiah, the effect would have been most adverse, and would have ruined completely the prospects of His work, because not only the nation but even His disciples had to unlearn the fixed and mistaken ideas of the past.

They expected their race to be exalted to supreme honor and power; a deep-rooted conviction prevailed that the Messiah would overwhelm every one by mighty manifestations of His majesty and omnipotence; they even anticipated that His entrance into the world would be with worldly pomp amid unprecedented signs and wonders in the heavens.

Such was the traditional belief of those times. As the Messiah had to teach and convince the people that it was by silent might, by humility, persecution and death that His grand work was to succeed, naturally enough it required tact, time, and careful schooling of men's minds, before He could expect them to receive and believe His real Personality. They had to be disillusioned and to be differently disposed, before He dared unveil Himself in His Godhead, as otherwise they would never have given Him hearing or toleration.

Thus it was by gradual process, occasional hints, and other preparatory means that He manifested Himself.

One would have thought that the apostles, who were ever with their divine Master, would have suspected and felt that He was more than human. When at length the disclosure was to be made, how were they disposed? Were they really fit to receive this wonderful revelation, were they inclined to listen to such a momentous and marvelous truth, and were they sufficiently spiritualized to grasp, and appreciate the



situation, when it was unfolded to them in its significant fullness? Evidently, the hour for this great revelation had at length arrived. On all occasions of moment, Christ betook Himself to prayer, and as this was to be an epoch-making incident, He prepared for this unprecedented and sublime manifesto by communing with His heavenly Father. His prayer finished, He again joined the Twelve, having determined to hear what was their conjecture concerning Himself, and to urge them to voice the popular opinion regarding Himself.

Then and there followed the first of those two momentous questions, the answers to which led to that full revelation of His identity. He asked them: "Who do men say the Son of Man is?" First, what was the people's opinion on this serious and evidently much discussed topic? Of course the purpose of Christ's inquiry was not for personal reasons, or for seeking information which He did not yet possess, but to serve as an introduction to the direct question: "Whom do YOU SAY that I am?"—to correct mistaken notions, and to elevate the apostles to a higher plane of thought. In styling Himself the "Son of Man," He thereby implicitly proclaimed His Messiahship, for this title was an allusion to the description of the Messiah as given by the prophet Daniel (Dan. vii. 13, 14).

It is significant from the different opinions which the apostles cited as rife amongst the Jews, that Christ was not recognized as the Messiah, or rather it proved their incompetency to form a correct opinion. Undoubtedly He was deemed and revered as a holy man, as otherwise they would not have taken Him to be John the Baptist.

This idea had arisen from the guilty and superstitious fears of Herod who had put the Precursor to



death. In consequence of this treacherous act the notion gained ground that the spirit of the Baptist had entered the "Son of Man," who was supposed to be continuing the work of John.

Others had represented Him as Elias, of whom Malachy had declared that he would be sent by God to warn a guilty generation.

This view was the outcome of comparing the strong and fearless denunciations of Christ with the stern and condemnatory reproaches of Elias, who in no measured terms had upbraided the people of his day.

Others again had regarded Him as Jeremias, who had come to disclose the hiding place of the Ark and of the sacred vessels, which had been hidden in Mount Nebo by this great prophet, who was expected to return and recover these lost treasures in the days of the Messiah.

A good proportion of the Jews imagined that Christ was "one of the former prophets" sent from the other world by God, to herald and prepare for the coming of the Desired of Nations.

No matter how much these opinions differed, or failed to clear the situation, they all agreed that Jesus was no ordinary man or teacher, and though the Twelve could not assure Him that any of the people regarded Him as the promised Messiah, they apparently attributed His mission to Heaven. Obviously, there was not a trace in all those answers of the idea that Christ was the Son of God, yet without any manifestation of displeasure or disappointment, Christ proceeded to the very point at issue, which was the purpose of the next question.

"But whom do YOU SAY that I am?" What was their opinion about Him? What was the difference between their opinion and that of the people concerning



Himself? "Whom do you say that I am," and the emphasis was on the word "you." Yes, what did they think about Him, what was their belief? Undoubtedly special stress was laid on the words, with which Christ elicited their verdict on this vital question.

Instantly, in the name of the rest, Simon, the impulsive, energetic and warm-hearted disciple, unhesitatingly gave utterance to that grand and time-honored answer: "Thou Art Christ, the Son of the Living God!"

Here then was the revelation concerning the Divinity of Christ, in other words, Simon definitely and with conviction declared that He was the Messiah, not only divinely sent, but Himself Divine.

Not Christ merely, but a Divine Christ—the God-Man, come to redeem by sacrifice, to intercede as an ever-living Priest, to rule in the fear and the love of God. Not merely a Messiah sent by God, but a Messiah who was God himself. The greatness and the significance of Simon's, or as we better know him, Peter's, confession is only too obvious, as can be seen by our Saviour's following words: "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar Jona; because flesh and blood have not revealed it to thee, but My Father who is in heaven." This meant that Peter could not have fathomed the truth he had just proclaimed by his own reason, and such knowledge could not have come except from Heaven. As Peter had confessed his faith concerning the person and identity of his Master; so the Master confessed concerning His disciple and He said: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Christ had given Peter the new name, in assurance that henceforth he should be the firm rock (the name



Peter means rock) and upon that rock, as a solid foundation, He would build His Church. Thus on the outskirts of a pagan city, Jesus, the Son of Man, was proclaimed to be the Messiah, and He then and there ratified Peter's confession, and requited it by the promise of the primacy of His Church—a primacy which should embrace all the future and the whole universe, and should reach up to the very gates of Heaven.

A grand promise in recompense for a grand confession.

Thus on that memorable day, when Peter gave vent to his deep and intense faith, by being the first to acknowledge so openly the divinity of his beloved Master, he received the great commission of trust to take over the charge of the Church once its Divine Founder had ascended into Heaven. As the Church was to be a permanent edifice, and to continue to the end of time, the privileges of being the foundation stone were attached to all the successors of Peter.

In spite of all the efforts of her enemies, she would never be destroyed or brought to nought, because Christ, who is God, had promised it duration equal to that of the world, and since "the gates of hell will not prevail against it," we believe and know that the Church of Christ will continue through all ages. Today the Catholic Church is still carrying on the great work of her Divine Founder, drawing into her fold countless people, and so marked is her influence that one eminent non-Catholic writer has stated that "she is only in the very beginning of a great . . . revival." Everywhere the Church of Christ is making her presence felt, everywhere inquiries are made about her claims and her unity, everywhere members of various religious sects and creeds are attending her



services and ceremonial, everywhere converts are being instructed and initiated into her doctrines and liturgy.

Each year witnesses the erection of new churches in every part of the globe, while the number of those who are finding peace, happiness and consolation within her fold is increasing enormously.

Of course such matters cannot leave any honest mind in doubt or speculation as to the vitality, vigor and the progress of the Catholic Church. Still, to my reckoning this valuable and incontestable circumstantial evidence does not secure the same consideration and attention, and deserve perhaps the same merit as do the unsolicited testimonies of those who are outside the pale of Catholicism. Let me cite a preacher of a Baptist Church in Pennsylvania, who during the course of a sermon said that "the Catholic Church has been the most remarkable in the history of the world. Such a mighty organization stands today an incomparable achievement and she possesses excellencies which all Protestants might well emulate." There is, too, the famous reference of Gladstone, one of England's greatest orators, who did not hesitate to speak of the Church: "This wondrous Church which is as old as Christianity itself and as universal as mankind, is today, after twenty centuries, as fresh and as vigorous, and as fruitful as on the day when the Pentecostal Fires were showered upon the earth. Surely such an institution challenges attention from those outside its pale."

To add force to my words and conviction to my assertion, let me finally quote the testimony of one who was in no way kindly disposed or partial to Catholicism, and that is none other than the redoubtable Lord Macaulay. He did not scruple to attest to the marvel-



ous power and influence of the Church, when he wrote saying that the "Catholic Church is still sending forth to the farthest ends of the world missionaries as zealous as those who landed in Kent with Augustine, and still confronting hostile kings with the same spirit with which she confronted Attila. She saw the commencement of all the governments and of all ecclesiastical establishments that now exist in the world; and we feel no assurance that she is not destined to see the end of them all."

Indeed "this wondrous Church," has survived the centuries, she outlived the Roman Empire, the Eastern Dynasty, the Frankish Empire, and without doubt she will outlive also the British Empire.

To this very hour the Catholic Church is as great in her strength as she is strong in her greatness, and she is as influential in her power, as she is powerful in her influence. Her greatness, her strength, her influence and her power are growing more and more each day, and she will never fail, for she is like to an image on the waters which is ever the same though the waters ever flow.



## XIX. The Transfiguration

WE come now to some momentous phases in our Saviour's Life which are hurrying us on to the climax of His ministry here on earth. It was precisely for the purpose of preparing and disciplining the apostles for the dramatic finale, that Christ deemed it fit to acquaint them, and make them familiar, with the idea of a suffering Messiah. And when they had been convinced of the Divinity of their Master, He bade them to tell the stupendous truth to no man, because as yet the mentality of the Jews was not properly disposed for such an astounding revelation. Now that the Twelve were satisfactorily alive to His divine Character, Jesus had further disclosures to make to them, truths which were hard, even repugnant, and no doubt quite irreconcilable with their rooted impressions of what the promised Messiah would be. Accordingly, He began to adapt the temper of the apostles, with a view to disposing them for His approaching violent and ignominious death; and to reconcile them to the inevitable shock was no easy task, as they were not anxious or ready to discard the time-honored notion that the Messiah was to come with all the pageantry, pomp and power of an earthly monarch.

This next disclosure was indeed a very sorrowful if not disheartening one, for it was to dash to the ground all idle speculations and hopes of earthly splendor, national suzerainty and worldly prosperity, and instead of His kingdom being of this world, the apostles



were to learn that it was to be the Kingdom of Heaven. Accordingly He told them that He had to go up to Jerusalem, and there "suffer many things, and be rejected by the Ancients, and by the Highpriests and the Scribes, and be killed; and after three days rise again" (Mark, viii. 31). Could anything be more unambiguous, more overwhelming and more unnerving than this unprecedented and distressing pronouncement!

Could any prospect have been more alarming! As yet the apostles did not grasp its significance and its amazing reality, and so foreign was this tragic prediction to their reckoning, that in their name, and with his usual impetuosity, Peter, their spokesman, went so far as to remonstrate with his divine Master saying: "Lord, be it far from Thee, this shall not be unto Thee" (Matt. xvi. 22).

This ill-directed forwardness, this presumptuous attitude, and this rash intervention on the part of Peter led to that terrible rebuke—a rebuke so severe that there is scarcely one that fell from the lips of our Lord that can be compared with it—"Go behind Me, Satan, thou art a scandal unto me: because thou savorest not the things that are of God, but the things that are of men" (Matt., xvi. 23).

Is it possible to conceive a more serious charge, or a sterner reproof? And all for what? Simply because Peter had become a tempter to his Lord, by suggesting that He should avoid death.

No sooner had Jesus addressed the severe rebuke to Peter, than, calling the people around Him, He continued the subject about which He had already begun to speak. The purport of this short discourse was to set forth the highest form of duty and service which would be the most acceptable to God, and at the same



time to discountenance excessive care and keen solicitude for the things of this world.

True and devoted followers of Christ must banish all thought of worldly gain, money, rank, honor, power and prosperity; they must rather expect to meet with ill-success, disappointments, setbacks, to be disliked, despised, underrated and persecuted, and even suffer death for the sake of securing life eternal. It was on this occasion too, that our Lord gave utterance to those few words which have at all times produced such a telling effect on the consciences of God-fearing people, and have influenced untold numbers to forsake the world: “. . . what shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his soul.” (Mark, viii. 36). After delivering this address, Jesus apparently did not leave the vicinity of Caesarea Philippi, but along with His disciples tarried there for a week or so. What happened during that interval the Sacred Chroniclers have not told us, but we may conjecture that they were for the Apostles days full of sad, disheartening, and grave thoughts, yet withal, there would no doubt have been a certain amount of hopeful outlook in the vague anticipations “of the predicted spiritual grandeur of the New Kingdom.” At the end of this seemingly uneventful period we learn that Jesus “taketh with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart to pray” (while the other Apostles remained in the plain below). The name of this “high mountain” is not mentioned in the Gospels, but tradition, which dates back to the earliest centuries of Christianity, identifies it with Mt. Thabor; though later commentators, and these principally non-Catholic, favor Hermon as the “mountain” in question.

However, we shall follow the traditional opinion,



and when we recall the testimony of Origen, who lived in the first half of the third century, and who did not hesitate to affirm that "Thabor is the mountain of Galilee on which Christ was transfigured," we are not accepting any wild or unwarranted conjecture. Mount Thabor lies to the north-east of the plain Esdraelon, a journey of about an hour and a half from Nazareth, and as it attains to some 2000 feet, it towers aloft over the surrounding hills and mountains. In shape it is not unlike a sugar-loaf, and of old it could boast of a certain picturesqueness, as it was covered with green trees and shrubs, but this pristine beauty has now given place to a bleak waste, for there is practically no vegetation, while a few black and gray specks mark the scattered trees which the axe of man has spared. It is no easy task to ascend Mt. Thabor, but he who does reach its summit, which is an oval tableland, will be well awarded for his efforts, as there is a wonderful panorama from its heights.

The whole expanse of Galilee may be seen, with its mountain chains, its valleys, its plains, and a blue corner of the lake, and one can even get a glimpse of the Mediterranean by looking through a hollow of Mt. Carmel and along a neck of the mountains of Nazareth.

It was to this spot, in the very heart of Galilee, on the heights of Thabor, that the Son of Man retired with His three favorite apostles, so that He might give Himself to ardent communion with His heavenly Father.

It was eventide when Jesus, accompanied by the three disciples, withdrew to the solitude and retirement of that unfrequented mountain top, and ere long His companions were fast asleep, for they were weary and spent with the day's toil. Their Master, who was apart from them, continued in His prayer, rapt in divine contemplation, while His soul was filled with the



crisis so fast approaching. Suddenly there came an ecstatic change over Him, He was surrounded by a wondrous effulgent glory, for "He was transfigured," so that the Divinity within shone through the veiling flesh till His raiment kindled to the dazzling brightness of light . . . and His face glowed with sunlike majesty, and to lend further glory to this solemn and peerless occasion, Moses and Elias, who had quitted this earth of ours many centuries previously, came out from the other world, and conversed with Him. These prophets of old spoke to their Lord and Master of the Redemption of mankind, which He was about to effectuate a little while hence by His Passion and Death.

Thus the tragedy of the Cross, which He was to accomplish in Jerusalem, loomed up before Him, during the resplendence and the majesty of the Transfiguration. Such a celestial vision and angelic scene filled the heights of Thabor with unparalleled and dazzling brilliancy; indeed, the effulgence was so excessive that the three disciples were thereby aroused from their slumbers, and forthwith they were privileged to gaze upon the "majesty" of Jesus, and to behold the "two men that stood with Him." What a blessed sight! The apostles were in mute admiration, as with riveted gaze they looked upon this threefold apparition, while their whole being thrilled with ecstatic jubilation, and, just as the brilliant spectacle was about to fade from view, Peter with his wonted irrepressibleness, and as though he desired to prolong the presence of the wondrous three, gave vent to what may seem an injudicious proposal. "Rabbi," said he, "it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. For he knew not what he said; for they were struck with fear"



(Mark, ix. 4, 5). Evidently Peter was so beside himself and so enraptured by this remarkable evidence of the glorified humanity of Christ, that he craved for a continuance of this supernatural interview. But while he was yet speaking a radiant cloud crowned the amazing spectacle, and from the luminous haze a voice announced: "This is my beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased: hear ye Him" (Matt. xvii. 5).

This was no other than the Eternal Father Himself, who was acknowledging Jesus as His only begotten Son, thereby sanctioning and confirming the great confession of Peter.

At these words the apostles were overcome with fear, and fell prostrate on the ground, not venturing to raise their eyes. At length, wishing to calm their fears, Jesus quietly touched them, saying: "Arise, and be not afraid," and they saw that He was once more alone.

The apparition was over, the wondrous spectacle had vanished from view, and the visible manifestation of the Divinity of Christ had now ceased. This exceptional and epoch-making incident left a very vivid and indelible impression on the mind of Peter, for, in later years [to be precise, some thirty-five years after Christ's Ascension], when he had occasion to write to the faithful, and wished to convince them of the Divinity of his Master, he recalled the Transfiguration on Mt. Thabor.

He reminded them that he was an "eye-witness of His majesty," and how, when "with Him in the holy mount," he heard the voice of God the Father declaring that Jesus was the Son of the Most High, and that since He was the living Voice of the Unseen Almighty, men were commanded to give ear to Him. This mysterious Transfiguration of the Son of God was one of



the means employed by Divine Providence to confirm the faith of the apostles, and to convince them of the Divinity of Christ. When the bright vision was over and gone, and the foretaste of heavenly delights had given place to the reality of earth, the three favored disciples "saw no one, but only Jesus" (Matt., xvii, 8).

I would that it could be said of each of us in all circumstances, conditions and seasons of our life that we saw "no one, but only Jesus." How happy and law-abiding we should be, if this could be said of us in our daily business and avocation, in our common-place occupations, in our trials and temptations, misfortunes and disasters, and in our evervdav interchange of words, deeds and ideas!

When the workman is tempted to waste his master's time or property, when the merchant or his assistant sees an opportunity for dishonesty or cheating, when a publisher considers putting out literature which he knows is reeking with evil and poisonous filth, when hardened seducers attempt to deprive young people of their virtue and purity, when habitual sinners delay their penance and reform, all would be checked in their evil ways, if they remembered to lift up their eyes to see Jesus who indeed is God Himself.

If we could be prevailed upon in moments of temptation to visualize "only Jesus," how strengthened we should be to resist temptation! In our dealings and intercourse with others, it would stimulate us to right-doing, it would save us from false shame, and it would impel us to work out our salvation in fear and trembling. It would induce us to avoid sloth and indolence in our religious duties; it would check our thoughts when they were apt to drift into uncharitable, unholy or unchaste channels; it would dispel the evil desires which Satan conjures up before us; it would aid us to



avoid fretfulness, self-satisfaction, sarcastic and hurting remarks, in a word, it would make us more godly and more spiritually minded.

Even when we feel burdened and depressed by the sense of sin, when the memory of serious transgressions makes us sad and despondent, and when there seems little prospect of our eternal salvation, then, too, it is well, indeed it is vital, that we should look up, and see "no one, but only Jesus." In the hour of heart-break and bitter sorrow, in time of privation, sore distress, when friends have proved unfaithful or treacherous, then take comfort that One knows and cares about you, and is able to heal every wound.

I read somewhere of a poor widow, who had become the victim of deepest melancholy, who refused to be comforted because her cherished husband had been cruelly snatched from her by death, but who was recalled to calmness by the question of her only child, who asked: "Mother, is Jesus dead?"

May that child's simplicity and faith teach us to remember that Jesus is not dead! Thus when the waves of trial and tribulation beat heavily upon us, when all is darkness, gloom, wretchedness within and around us, and when Satan and the powers of hell seem about to overcome us and hurl us into the infernal pit, then, remember that "only Jesus" can give us the strength to fight the good fight, and lift us up to perform our duties with courage, cheerfulness and resignation to the will of God.

And when, at length, we come to lay down the burden of life, may we again behold "no one, but only Jesus"!

But, observe, if the presence of Jesus is to abide with us in our final moments, it must be cherished and kept at all cost in our days of health and vigor, when



all is well. It is in the House of God, as we kneel before the tabernacle of our Eucharistic Jesus, it is during Mass and Benediction, in our approaching the sacraments, and in acts of fervent prayer and praise, that we impress upon our minds the love and presence of Jesus only. God grant that in that most solemn and momentous day, for which all other days were to prepare us, we may lift up our eyes, not with terror and despair, but with loving trust and exultant hope—lift up our eyes unto that throne whereon we shall behold face to face “no one, but only Jesus”!



## XX. The Question of Personal Moment

THE occasion for the oft-told and touching parable of the Good Samaritan was, as we read in the Gospel, the question of a "certain lawyer" who asked our Saviour what one should do "to possess eternal life."

On His last journey from Capharnaum to Jerusalem, Jesus taught the people at various places on the way, and it is not unlikely that He delivered this beautiful and instructive parable in the vicinity of Jericho. This town was a favorite center for priests and lawyers, and large numbers of them seemed to have resided there. Who this "certain lawyer" was, we do not know, but his professional rank makes it quite evident that he belonged to that caste of religious rigorists, whose province it was to impart instruction in the Law. The name "lawyer" was also applied to the scribes, and these lawyers and scribes held that the Law of Moses contained and supplied a complete guide for the whole conduct of life.

Out of the precepts and principles of this Law they succeeded in elaborating a detailed series of answers to every religious problem, but their interpretations were so hair-splitting and quibbling that the Law became a severe burden on people's consciences.

While this arbitrary discipline was not backed by authoritative teaching, yet the scribes had great influence over the people. Our Lord's teaching stood out in contrast with their narrow-minded and often enough evasive elaboration, and in His endeavor to recall men to the true religious teaching, He did not scruple to



denounce the errors and unmask the hypocrisy of the scribes.

In consequence of this exposure and refutation, it was but natural that the lawyers were inimical to Christ and His teaching, and in their desire for revenge they not only tried to catch our Lord in His speech, but they even allied themselves with their very opponents, the Herodians and the Sadducees. Now it may have been that this "certain lawyer" put his question for malicious motives, or through the promptings of a captious or prying spirit, but the earnestness of our Lord's reply who was seldom wont to give heed or serious answer to hypocrites, seems to indicate that the question was asked in good faith. Of course it is quite true that the lawyer stood up "tempting" Christ, and this at first reckoning does not favor a friendly attitude but a critical spirit; however the expression here implies that a test-question was being put.

Then again the serious nature of the question argues well for the lawyer's sincerity, for no evil-minded person would ask what he must do "to possess eternal life," at all events such information is not likely to interest the devotees of this world.

It is worthy of note that Christ replied by putting a counter-question, as He had so often done to others on previous occasions; hence He asked: "What is written in the Law? How readest thou?" This procedure no doubt surprised and rather disconcerted the lawyer, as he would not have expected to be referred to the Law; besides the answer which he got suggested that his question was unwarranted. Events proved that he was not unworthy of his professional rank, for in reply to Christ's question he cited correctly and without any hesitation the authoritative teaching of Moses, with regard to the great commandment of God,



which dictated that one must love God and his neighbor.

At once our divine Lord commended him, in that he had answered rightly, and bade him to make this high ideal the mainspring of his daily action. No command could be clearer, but the lawyer was not satisfied as was evidenced by the further question he put.

He wished to show that the real difficulty was not solved, and, at the same time he was anxious to vindicate himself and to extricate himself from the awkward situation in which he had got entangled.

Accordingly, to evade further thrusts, and thus to clear himself, he asked: "And who is my neighbor?" Without any preface, Jesus then told that simple yet eminently instructive story, which has been recorded for posterity in the parable of the Good Samaritan, which shows to us the true and distinctive spirit of charity.

"A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho," a distance of about twenty miles, and going down from the Holy City means in this instance not merely leaving the capital, but the man was actually journeying downwards, for the road descends very steeply in the direction of Jericho, which is situated considerably lower than Jerusalem.

The main route between these two cities twisted and turned through wild and rocky country; it was narrow and beset with deep gulleys and caves, while in other places it was hemmed in by cliffs, altogether a very suitable region for highway robbers. So notoriously insecure was this road, and so many the excesses committed by highwaymen, that it had been given the ill-omened name of the "Red" or "Bloody Way."

According to the testimony of the historian



Josephus, it appears that Herod at one time discharged from the service of the Temple some thousand men, and he adds that many of them became outlaws, and no doubt they found suitable quarters along the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. At all events, then, and even now, that same thoroughfare was and is infested by bandits and murderous gangs, and so numerous were the places offered by the road for perpetrating all sorts of felony, that a lone traveler could easily be surprised and overcome.

He might cry for help, or shriek with pain and anguish with death-groans, and the only answer would be the echoes of his own agonies. As recently as 1820 an English tourist was there murderously attacked, though his would-be assassins were foiled in their fell purpose.

About half way along the descent from Jerusalem to Jericho, close to the deep gorge of Wady Kelt, there is a heap of ruins that marks the traditional site of the ancient khan or inn to which the Samaritan took the man who "fell among robbers." Nearby, the road led through a narrow defile, and it was there that the man was set on by villainous bandits, "who stripped him, and having wounded him, went away, leaving him half dead." This description suggests that the story of the Good Samaritan was an actual occurrence, and there is no inherent impossibility in such a supposition.

The mentioning of stripping first and wounding afterwards, emphasizes the care of those brigands not to damage their victim's clothing, which in all probability formed an important part of the booty. Once they had deprived him of all he possessed, they beat him unmercifully, and then made off, leaving him by the road-side half dead.

As he lay there writhing in pain, ghastly with



wounds, bleeding, half-dazed and apparently dying, "it chanced," or rather by a Providential coincidence, a "certain priest" went along that way, and noticing the wounded and seemingly dying man, purposely refrained from rendering assistance and hurried by, doubtless feeling uneasy and concerned solely about his own safety. Here let me add that a large number of priests and their assistants resided at Jericho (The City of Palms), which, besides being the priestly headquarters, was also a busy commercial center on the highway from Galilee to Jerusalem. Now, it is not unlikely that this particular priest was on his way home from the Temple-service at the Holy City, or perhaps actually going to officiate there; in either event, he was not, as circumstances showed, an edifying and exemplary type of the priestly caste. At any rate, what is more of moment, is the fact that this "certain priest" wilfully failed to observe the weightier precepts of the Law, and he was one who had never learnt what that meant: "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice."

Why! Did not the Law forbid anyone to refuse a helping hand even to an enemy who had got into trouble with his beast of burden? what then must have been the strictness of the obligation when it was a fellow-man in bodily distress? In all probability this priest was actually carrying with him a copy of the very Law, yet when he found this fellow-man in dire distress, he heeded him not and walked on, leaving the unfortunate victim to his fate. Soon afterwards, a Levite, whose duty it was to wait on the priests at the altar, and to attend to the supplies for the Temple, and one whom therefore, from the very nature of his calling, we would also expect to be charitably disposed, came upon the scene. He likewise could not help seeing



the victim of the robbers' violence, but observing the serious nature of the situation, and being afraid of delaying on a spot in which there was unmistakable evidence of insecurity, he forthwith took to his heels.

No sooner had the selfish and pitiless Levite hurried away than a Samaritan came along on horseback, and if anyone had excuse for leaving the dying Jew to his fate, it was this Samaritan. These two belonged to different nations, they had rival temples, and so deep-rooted and intense was their mutual animosity and loathing, and the friction was so age-long, that violent and deadly reprisals were often enough the order of the day.

Amongst the Jews the bitterest term of reproach was to call a man a Samaritan, as was instanced when they said to Jesus: "Thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil" (John, viii. 48).

The Samaritan was, in the opinion of Jews, denied all benefit and participation in the resurrection; to partake of his bread was just as defiling as eating the flesh of swine, while his women-folk were held in bitterest abhorrence. In a word a Samaritan was to the Jew what of old the slave was to the free-man. On their side, the Samaritans were just as antagonistic and hateful, for they never offered hospitality to a Jew, they mocked, attacked, and sometimes slew those who were going up to Jerusalem for the Jewish Feasts, and they even scattered dead men's bones within the hallowed precincts of the Jewish temple so as to prevent the keeping of the Passover. To give a fitting illustration of the traditional hatred that still exists between Jew and Samaritan, a traveler in our own times relates how he saw a Jew and a Samaritan tugging at each other's beards.

Yet, when this Samaritan came upon the suffering



Jew he at once alighted from his horse, and in genuine compassion and affection for the wounded man, made him a friend, a neighbor, nay more, treated him as his own brother. At once he sets to work to do all he can for the poor man, and, in his brotherly love, he sets aside all considerations of self, and puts himself completely at the service of him who was his avowed enemy.

Promptly, he exerted himself to revive the stricken Jew by applying a mixture of oil and wine, which in the East was regarded as a highly effective though costly lotion for assuaging pain, and for putting a stop to bleeding. He moreover moistened the Jew's lips with wine, thus reviving in him the flickering flame of life, then he assisted him into the saddle, and at a slow pace, brought him to the nearest inn.

The ordinary Eastern caravanserai in which merely shelter was afforded to travelers had no host or food supplies. The inn must have been a place comparable to a tavern, for in those days inns, as we know them in the meaning of hotels, were not needed, hospitality having been in those days and lands not only a general custom, but a recognized and strict duty.

In those days, too, hospitals were unknown. The Samaritan did not consider his services ended when he found shelter for the wounded man at the inn, for he himself attended to his ill-fated charge, and it was only when business compelled him to leave "the next day" that he entrusted the Jew to the care and keeping of strangers. He went to the innkeeper and bade him do all he could for the unfortunate man, making necessary provision for his board and lodging, by giving the innkeeper "two pence." This sum sounds to us very small and inadequate, but we must bear in mind that in those days it was equivalent to a couple



of days' wages; at any rate, it was considered sufficient to provide for several days. The Samaritan may have been a traveling merchant who was journeying on business and expected to return along that same way, for he assured the landlord that whatever further expenses were incurred, he would settle the account on his return.

This story of the liberal-minded Samaritan's kindness to the Jew in distress, was the answer of Jesus to the lawyer who asked Him: "Who is my neighbor?" Therefore, teaching him out of his own mouth, Jesus said to him: "Go, and do thou in like manner." The sufferer whom thou canst relieve, the ignorant whom thou canst instruct, the degraded whom thou canst elevate, the oppressed whom thou canst protect, wherever he may be, and whatever his nationality, *he* is thy neighbor. Go, therefore, and do to him as the Samaritan did to the wounded traveler!

The lawyer came to Christ with the inquiry, "Who is my neighbor," but the plain moral contained in our Lord's advice, viz., "Go, and do thou in like manner," shows that Jesus would have us put the question in another form, namely—"To whom can I be neighbor?"

Now observe, it is not to which of them was the sick man a neighbor, but, who proved a neighbor to the sick man?

Our Lord's procedure with the lawyer brought out in clear contrast the main point of difference between the letter of the old Law and the spirit of the Gospel. The Law needed a specific injunction, it sought definitions and limitations, it endeavored to pare down one's obligations and to minimize responsibilities, it marked off well-defined boundaries; it was careful to observe in every detail the letter of the precept, but was even more careful not to go beyond it.



The Gospel, on the other hand, is a book of living principles of universal application, it has a freeness and a fullness which refuses to be edged in, cramped and formally prescribed by narrow boundaries, and it must not be regarded as if it were a schedule of rules, with detailed directions for every line of action, or for every type of conduct.

The true Gospel spirit delights in seeking for opportunities of helping wherever men may find them, of doing everything within one's power, without regard to person, rank, creed, nationality and any other characteristics. As we go along the highway of life, each of us may find plenty of occasions of exercising that love, which finds a neighbor in every one who is in need and seeks our help. "The poor you have always with you," said our Lord to the disciples of His time, and the same holds good today. Our many organizations of charity afford us ample scope of extending our charity to those who are less fortunate than ourselves in the possession of this world's goods.

Besides the poor, there are sad and aching hearts, dreary, unsolaced lives, men and women who through their own fault or through some adverse circumstance have come down in the world, surely such as these call for considerations of kindness, which with a little personal exertion or good-will can be effected. Little children need a guiding hand; aged folk who have lost their nearest and their dearest have to be cared for; those who have been bruised and battered by sin, need encouragement and shelter. Such opportunities as these are unmistakable appeals to our charity, which we can put into practice by putting our hands into our pockets and giving according to our means.

You may say, "Silver and gold I have none," but money is not the only means wherewith to practice the



principles of our charity. We are most of us ready enough to seize an opportunity for pleasure or gain when it comes along our way, but how many miss or put off an opportunity of doing good! Opportunities that are ignored, pass from us, but though unheeded, remember that an account will have to be rendered concerning them. Undoubtedly opportunities of being a "neighbor" come to us all in turn, if only we have the will to seize them, and if we are willing to exercise some restraint in our own expenditure, we may do by proxy much that we cannot do in person.

Though it may not be possible for all of us to rescue the perishing, to uplift the down-trodden and the oppressed, to guide and protect the wayward, to nurse and tend the sick and the suffering, to house the homeless, to visit the lonely and the neglected, and to inaugurate a crusade of charity, still, we can in our own particular sphere do something to alleviate or decrease the many miseries of the day.

When there is promptness and large-heartedness, self-sacrifice and perseverance, opportunities will not fail to present themselves for our consideration and kindness. The love of Christ is heroically self-sacrificing and ingeniously inventive, thoroughly considerate, and perseveringly energetic.

Let us remember that no life is truly Christ-like which lives for itself alone and ignores the needs of others.

Finally, let us bear in mind that the lesson of the Good Samaritan is not for a select few, but that right down the ages to each of us there comes the echo of those Christ-spoken words: "Go, and do thou in like manner."



## XXI. The Lord's Prayer

SOME days after the Feast of Tabernacles—one of the greatest of all Jewish solemnities celebrated in Jerusalem—it came to pass that Jesus was in the vicinity of the Holy City, and on that occasion He was asked by His disciples to teach them how to pray.

The Feast of Tabernacles owed its title to the fact that the people dwelt for seven days in tents or booths, made of green boughs, and erected in the streets, courts, market places and on the flat roofs of houses. It was the oldest attested historical feast of the Jewish year, taking place in the month of Tishri, and lasting for seven days, namely from the 15th to the 22nd of that month. Tishri was the seventh month of the year, and corresponded with the latter part of our September and the beginning of October.

This feast occurred four days after the Day of Atonement—the close of the Jewish Lent. It was a most picturesque and joyful festival, the object of which was to recall or commemorate the forty years' sojourn in the wilderness, and the deliverance from the hardships which their fathers experienced when on their journey to the land of Canaan they lived in arbors. The solemnities were also an occasion for thanking God for the harvest. The festivity was especially distinguished by the sacrifices which were more numerous than at any other time, and by drawing water from the Pool of Siloe, whither the people crowded, bearing in their right hand a yellow citron, and in their left a bunch of



palm, myrtle, and willow twigs, tied together with a silver or gold cord.

The court of the Temple was brilliantly illuminated by torches, and this particular feature of the festival, along with the ceremony of the drawing of water (in remembrance of the Messianic types, the pillar of cloud, and the water from the rock in the wilderness) made the Feast of Tabernacles a true Messianic feast.

After this solemnity, Jesus withdrew from Jerusalem, and on the occasion referred to we find Him on Mt. Olivet, His disciples enjoying the privilege of beholding their Master rapt in prayer "erect, with uplifted arms, and eyes raised heavenward." Some have hazarded the opinion that Jesus was actually praying aloud, which conjecture has no doubt the sanction of custom, for the Jews did recite their prayers audibly, a practice which Christ Himself followed on some other occasions.

With profound reverence and enraptured astonishment, the disciples watched intently their dear Lord, as He stood there engaged in fervent prayer, for in the East standing and not kneeling was the usual attitude for praying. The sight filled their hearts with a keen desire of being able in some measure to pray as He did, yet they dare not interrupt Him, for "both the Mishna and the Talmud lay it down, that prayer was not to be interrupted to salute a king, nay, to uncoil a serpent that had wound round the foot," yet strangely enough it was allowed to interrupt it for a scorpion.

However when at length Jesus had finished, "one of His disciples said to Him: Lord teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples" (Luke xi. 1). This disciple voiced the yearnings of all the others, for as they all believed in the Divinity of their Master, they thought it fitting that He should teach them how to



pray. Frequently they had beheld Him absorbed in prayer, and they were anxious, as was but natural, to learn the right means, the method, and the way to set about it.

Of course the Jews had their set forms of prayer, such as psalms, hymns and songs, and under prayer may be grouped the various formulas of benediction, malediction, greeting, and farewell that are couched in devout language. Most of the formal prayers found in the Old Testament suggest entreaty or supplication, though, at the same time, they contain other features which are frequently associated with prayer.

The practice of prayer was frequent. Thus the Jews prayed thrice daily, and if they desired to engage in private devotions they were at liberty to do so whether within the precincts of their own rooms, on the housetop, or even at a street corner.

The Temple being the divinely appointed seat and symbol of worship, they would, if unable to make their devotions there, turn their faces in its direction, no matter when or where they prayed.

It was customary for the rabbis to teach their disciples some forms of devotion, as the reference by the disciple to John indicated, hence it was no unusual request that the disciple, on behalf of his companions, was prompted to ask for some form of prayer which would be suitable for all wants and occasions.

Where precisely this incident happened cannot be determined with any certainty, but a local tradition has assigned the western slope of Mt. Olivet, facing Jerusalem, as the most likely spot.

In confirmation of this view, there is the fact that the Crusaders built a church not far from the summit of Mt. Olivet to mark the site and to perpetuate the memory of this sublime incident.



Over ruins of this church there has been erected a far more magnificent structure, as well as a monastery, in the cloisters of which, hanging on the walls, are thirty-one or two frames, each containing the "Our Father," and all in different languages.

The Mount of Olives, the name of which is derived from the abundance of olives that were cultivated on its slopes, is a prominent hill to the East of Jerusalem, and is about a sabbath's day journey away, that is to say about a mile distant. It was separated from the city by the narrow valley of Kedron. From its heights is afforded a glorious panorama of the Holy City, as well as of the surrounding country, including the wilderness, the Jordan valley, and the North shore of the Dead Sea. The range of Olivet is about a mile in length, and it is hallowed by many ancient and sacred traditions.

It was on its slopes, that Jesus, "seeing the city" (Jerusalem) "wept over it." Bethania, on the south-east side, was honored on the evenings of Passion Week by the presence of our Lord; it also witnessed His agony and betrayal. It was from its summit that He ascended into Heaven, and there is every reason to believe that it was also the scene of the "Our Father."

Whether it is the exact spot or not, the fact remains that Jesus was requested by His disciples to teach them how to pray, and in return His divine lips gave utterance to that sublime and most solemn of all prayers, the "OUR FATHER."

Truly wise and indeed providential was the demand of that disciple, who asked His Master to teach them the ideal method and form of prayer, for to him we are indebted for that simple, yet so beautiful type which is known amongst us as the Lord's Prayer; and



which, in the power of its effects, in the fullness of its contents, in the brevity and clearness of its expression, proves the divinity of its origin. The Lord's Prayer is not merely one among a number of prayers, but it is the ideal and representative of them all, and its special charm and grandeur are due to the fact that it came from the lips of God Himself, and therefore is God's own choice.

Indeed, it is a framework for all prayers, and it has been called truly "a summary of the Gospel."

The disciples desired that Jesus should suggest to them a prayer that would realize and satisfy all the aspirations and needs of man, one that would embody the germ and the kernel of the religion of their Divine Master, and one that would be an epitome of God's relations and dealings with His creatures. Complying with their wish He taught them the Our Father. Take well to heart that it is the only prayer He recommended; one of the simplest in the world; the most deeply significant that man addresses to his God, a prayer composed of plain words, unlearned, neither bold nor servile. It is the most beautiful of all Christian prayers, and its deep power, beauty and value lie in the fact that we make this prayer not only in the name of God, but with His very words. It is a prayer which accommodates itself to all occasions and to all types of people, saints and sinners, young and old. During all the ages of Christianity it has carried to Heaven the countless aspirations and wants of mankind, and brought back from the throne of God innumerable corresponding graces and blessings.

It is only a short prayer, some fifty words in all, yet short though it is, for two thousand years it has been recited in practically every part of the world and in almost every tongue, and to this day it is frequently on



the lips of untold multitudes. Yes, indeed, it is only a very small prayer, yet an all-wise and far-seeing God deemed it all-sufficient for mankind. St. Augustine tells us that if we examine all the prayers scattered here and there in the pages of Holy Writ, we shall find in them no more than is contained in the words of the Lord's Prayer. It is a veritable model of prayer after which all our prayers should be formed, for it declares and regulates the highest duty of man. Its efficacy and sublimity are to be found in its tone of confidence, in its absolute unselfishness, in its inspiring spirituality, and in its sincerity of purpose. In addition its clearness, its completeness, and its simplicity make it the ideal prayer, hence we should frequently recite it, and hold it in the highest esteem.

It presents to us a wide and beautiful range of thought and an inexhaustible source for meditation. It carries a message to every heart, so it will not be futile if we briefly reflect upon some of its phases. It may be classified under two general headings: the honor and the glory of God, and the necessities of man; or we may regard it as an act of praise and an act of supplication.

The prayer opens with a preface, followed by seven petitions, wherein we express our ardent desire for the increase of God's glory, the spread of His Kingdom, and the accomplishment of His divine will. We also beseech Him to satisfy our human wants, grant us pardon for past offences, and vouchsafe strength sufficient to overcome temptation.

The words "Our Father, who art in heaven," form the preface. The most honorable and endearing title of *Father* is purposely employed at the beginning in order to suggest His goodness, tenderness and liberality, thus to dispose us favorably to reverence, love and



submission, and to urge us to approach Him with greater confidence.

The little yet significant word "Our" is to remind us that we all are in the sight of God members of one family, hence we are to awaken within us the spirit of fellowship, which will or rather should encourage us to love and pray for one another. Asking Our Father to "give us this day our daily bread," does not limit our request merely to the food and raiment which our body stands in need of, but also extends to the Eucharistic Bread—which Christ instituted for the nourishment and sanctification of the soul, and without which it becomes weak and feeble. The words of the petition, "lead us not into temptation," do not of course imply that God actually tempts man, or moves him to evil; this would be in complete opposition to His divine attributes of holiness and love. What then do we really ask for in this particular petition? Obviously enough we do not crave to be exempted from temptation—that would be asking for a miracle, for life is essentially a time of probation, and if there is no cross, there can be no crown. Even our Lord permitted Himself to be tempted, that He might teach us the expediency and the necessity of temptation and the manner of resisting it. Certainly Christ could not have intended that His disciples should pray for exemption from external conflicts and solicitations to evil which come from the devil and his wicked agents; for these are inseparable from man's fallen nature, which is a continual source of temptation. What we ask, then, is that we may not be led into situations that will form for us, in our weakness, occasions of sin. We pray that we may not be abandoned in our temptation—that in all assaults from the devil, such as God may



be pleased to allow, He will give us support and strength sufficient to resist victoriously.

The Our Father occupies a very conspicuous position in the liturgy of the Church, in the divine office, in the sacraments and sacramentals; in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass it is one of the few prayers which the priest recites aloud. Needless to add it is one of the first prayers that children learn at their mother's knee.

It is the most excellent prayer that we can say, for it has been taught us by none other than Jesus Himself. Surely then when we recite it, we should do so with recollection, piety, fervor and sincerity. In this most beautiful prayer, we address our heavenly Father in tender and intimate accents of loving confidence. Hence let us say those old familiar words reverently, more feelingly, more unselfishly. Let us put our whole heart into those sweet words which mean love, trust, honor and obedience, and in this prayer let us find a safe refuge amidst all the perils of our life-long and momentous task of saving our immortal souls.



## XXII. The Friends of Jesus at Bethany

DURING the final stages of His earthly ministry, Jesus found from time to time a happy and restful home in that quiet house at Bethany, where lived the family of Martha, Mary, and their brother Lazarus, whom, St. John has assured us, "Jesus loved."

The village of Bethany, or Bethania, was situated on the eastern slope of Mt. Olivet, and thus was completely hidden from the view of the Holy City, which was only two miles away. Not only was this delightful retreat a fit sanctuary of restful seclusion for Jesus, but in that happy household He found hearts that could and did respond to His own.

In those far-off days this village was known as Bethany—"The House of Dates"—so styled perhaps from the many palm-trees which grew in that vicinity, but in modern times it is called "El-Azarieh," the Arabic for Lazarus. During the days of Christ and afterwards this spot could boast of a fair population, and was comparable to one of those residential suburbs which we find within easy reach of great cities; though nowadays only twenty or thirty hovels mark the site. Our interest in this formerly prosperous neighborhood lies in the fact that Jesus more than once sought there the hospitality of Lazarus and his two sisters, with whom He formed an affectionate friendship. When precisely He first became acquainted with these three is not known, but it has been stated that they became His disciples in the early stages of His missionary activities in Judea.



At the beginning of the first century the chief governor of Phœnician Syria was Theophilus, probably a Jew by birth, and certainly of good family, who was married to Eucharia, likewise of Jewish extraction. These were the parents of Lazarus and his two sisters, who through their mother became heirs to lands in different parts of Palestine.

Martha seems to have been the eldest, for she was the head of the household and occupied herself with domestic concerns.

She, like her sister and her brother Lazarus, was conspicuous for her quick intelligence and natural eloquence, while her affability, charming grace, rare beauty, modesty and love of the poor, won for her great esteem and respect. Her sister, Mary, was better known as Magdalene. Through her patrimony at Magdala, which tradition assigned as her birth-place, we can readily understand how it came to pass that she was styled Magdalene. She was some years younger than her sister, and notwithstanding certain similarities, her character was quite different. As the elder sister appears grave, energetic, eager-hearted, austere and sedate, in a like measure Mary gives the idea of having been frivolous, dreamy, self-opinionated, superficial, extravagant, passionate, and totally reckless where conventionality or public opinion were concerned. Undoubtedly she was possessed of great charms, unrivaled beauty, refinement and culture, superior education and irresistible personality; and with these fascinating attractions she beguiled her many wanton admirers, once she had given herself up to an abandoned life.

She had married quite young, but ill-mated with the jealous and rigid scribe, Paphus, it occasioned little surprise among her acquaintances when she deserted



him. Proud of her beauty and her other alluring gifts, and craving the triumphs they could secure, she cast aside all self-respect, propriety and virtue, and rejoiced in the number of victims she misled. When at last she had reached the very depths of degradation, and had become a physical wreck and the slave of the unclean spirit, she heard of the wonderful kindness, mercy and love of Jesus, and feeling convinced that He would do something to rescue her from herself and her evil ways, she cast herself at His feet, and there she heard those beautiful, consoling and time-honored words of forgiveness and reconciliation: "Many sins are forgiven her, because she hath loved much" (Luke, vii. 47).

Though the part played by Lazarus is less striking, yet his sisters when they sent word to Jesus of his serious illness felt justified in saying: "Lord, behold he whom thou lovest is sick" (John, xi. 3).

Tradition has associated Lazarus with a military career. It seems quite certain that at an early date he became a staunch supporter of the Messianic teaching, which led to his becoming one of the chosen disciples of the Divine Master.

During the latter days of Christ's public ministry, Martha, Mary and their brother lived together at Bethany. Different though these two sisters were in character, they were both keenly attached and dutifully devoted to our blessed Lord, and this unreserved and mutual affection, and profound reverence, made their home a hospitable and peaceful abode for their divine Friend. In view of this, there is no room for any wonder that Jesus sought retirement, rest and refreshment in that delightful retreat, and it afforded Him a safe refuge after a day of fatigue and conflict with His adversaries, for the authorities and the



people at large, instead of joyfully accepting Him, were becoming steadily more obdurate and decidedly hostile. Thus, whenever His teaching or labors were in any degree public, at once the Pharisees and their following made efforts to ensnare Jesus in His speech, or endeavored in some way or other to make Him commit Himself; in a word, their malignity and duplicity knew no bounds.

Jerusalem and Judea were evidently finished with Him, so much so that He did not venture to appear in those parts; the same applied to Galilee. Accordingly He betook Himself into the half-heathen country of Perea, across the Jordan, and there made great advances, for many came to hear Him, while not a few actually became His disciples.

His successful stay in Perea was, however, soon to be interrupted, for an unforeseen incident necessitated His departure, and what is more significant was the fact that it also precipitated the crisis of His life. The house at Bethany, where Jesus had enjoyed hospitality, kindness and affection, was filled with gloom and anxiety, for Lazarus lay prostrated by a severe illness, which was observed to be taking a critical turn. The first thought of Martha and Mary was of Jesus, so at once they despatched messengers to their divine Friend to inform Him that he whom He loved was sick.

His love for Lazarus naturally led the two sisters to believe that such an urgent appeal and such implicit confidence would instantly prompt their dear Lord to return at once to the side of him, whom later He called "Our friend" (John, xi. 11). Doubtless, too, the messengers expected that Jesus would hastily accompany them to the house of Lazarus; but instead He merely gave the assurance that the sickness was



not unto death, "but for the glory of God: that the Son of God may be glorified by it" (John, xi. 4).

Jesus of course knew, when the messengers arrived with the tidings of Lazarus' serious ailment, that he was already dead.

"Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister Mary, and Lazarus," yet for two days more He remained where He was, apparently unconcerned about the sad plight of His friend.

Only after the lapse of two days He acquainted His disciples with His intention of returning to Judea, which determination filled them with amazement and apprehension. At the mention of Judea, the place of greatest peril to Jesus, the perplexed and scared disciples forthwith remonstrated with Him saying: "Rabbi, the Jews but now sought to stone Thee: and goest Thou thither again?" (John, xi. 8). The open malice, the evil designs, and the avowed enmity of the Jews had compelled Him to seek safety beyond the Jordan, hence it was quite natural that His disciples could not understand why He should again walk into danger, perhaps even court death itself.

Their remonstrances and protestations, which were the outcome of a strong personal love for their divine Master, and which no doubt were also due to fear for their own safety, prompted that inspired reply from Jesus, which made it perfectly self-evident that in returning to Judea He was quite aware that He was fulfilling the will of His Heavenly Father, and walking in the divinely-appointed path of His mission.

Accordingly, He assured the timid disciples that danger would not stop Him in the performance of His task, and so long as He followed the path of duty, there was no occasion for alarm. Real peril comes in disobeying a divine call. He then went on to tell them



why He was going to Bethany, 'despite what recent events might forbode, and in spite of all danger: "Lazarus our friend sleepeth: but I go that I may awake him out of sleep." They took His words literally, believed that He spoke of that natural sleep which often marks the turn in a crisis, and which is also taken as a good symptom of pending recovery, hence they joyfully exclaimed: "Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well" (John, xi. 12).

However, they were soon disillusioned, for He told them plainly that Lazarus was dead, and that He was glad for their sake that He had not been there, in order that now He might yet give a far greater proof of His Divinity. This startling piece of news implied that a far-reaching and divinely-arranged lesson was going to be given, which could not have been given had He been at Bethany at the death of Lazarus; for then He could not have exercised His God-given prerogative of reclaiming His friend from death. But now that he was dead, the occasion presented itself of unfolding to Martha and Mary the apparently inexplicable problem of pain; of teaching His disciples a lesson of trust and further loyalty, and of proving to His foes His Divinity.

Though the disciples felt quite convinced that their beloved Master's determination to return to His sorely-bereaved friends was tantamount to signing His own death-warrant, none the less, when Thomas addressed them saying: "Let us also go, that we may die with Him" (John, xi. 16), they cheerfully accompanied Jesus on what they deemed a rash and perilous adventure. On arriving at Bethany they learnt that Lazarus had already been dead and buried for four days, for, apart from the fact that the Jews were most particular about prompt burials, the hot climate made



it necessary that a deceased person should be interred on the very day of his death.

Once the Angel of Death had done his dire work, the corpse was washed and wrapped in the best shroud that circumstances would allow. A lighted lamp was placed beside the corpse so as to betoken the immortality of the soul, while an egg was broken as a symbol of mortality. The funeral itself was a very gloomy if not weird ceremony, for mourners were hired to make demonstrations of woe, flute-players rent the air with shrill, plaintive notes, while wailing women, beating their breasts and tearing their dishevelled hair, gave vent to shrieks and pitiful cries, which all added to the anguish and gloom of the occasion. Relatives, friends, and neighbors accompanied with Martha and Mary the bier which carried the corpse to what seemed the final resting place of Lazarus. He was not buried in a cemetery, but, as became his station, he was buried in a private tomb, which was a cave or a vault.

Upon returning from the burial there began the mourning at home, which according to Jewish custom lasted for thirty days. On the first three days, styled the "days of weeping," the mourners abstained from servile work. In this particular case, the two disconsolate sisters with veiled heads, unsandled feet, sat on the floor with rent garments, and when the bereaved ones did venture a remark, it would be for the sake of touching a sympathetic chord in the hearts of those present. Before Jesus actually arrived on this distressing scene four days of intense sadness had elapsed, and when Martha became aware of His approach, she, without acquainting her sister with her intention, went out to meet Him.

As soon as she saw her dear Lord, she cried out in broken accents of gentle reproach, that had He been



there four days ago, this sad event would not have occurred. This childlike faith and pitiable regret touched the Heart of her Divine Friend, who assured her that her brother would rise again, but this promise she merely took as an allusion to the "resurrection at the last day" for no doubt she dared not hope for more. Whereupon He said to her: "I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE; HE THAT BELIEVETH IN ME, ALTHOUGH HE BE DEAD, SHALL LIVE; AND EVERY ONE THAT LIVETH, AND BELIEVETH IN ME, SHALL NOT DIE FOR EVER. Believeth thou this? She said to Him: YEA, LORD, I HAVE BELIEVED THAT THOU ART CHRIST, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD, WHO ART COME INTO THIS WORLD" (John, xi. 25-27).

Here then was her own profession of belief in the Divinity of Christ, and the miracle that followed went to prove His claim, for none but God has mastery over life and death. After her wondrous attestation to the Messianic character of Jesus, she went back to the house and told her sister that the Master had arrived and wanted to see her.

When Mary met her Lord, she fell at His feet, and in her deep emotion she made the same complaint as her sister, and in her excess of grief she could say nothing more.

This touching sight of Mary weeping again filled the divine Heart of Jesus with deep sympathy and grief, and after He had asked to show Him where they had laid her brother, He followed them. When at length He reached the grave, He bade them remove the huge stone that was fitted into the entrance of the vault, whereupon Martha, deeming it improper to expose to public gaze the corrupting remains of her brother, voiced her disapproval at such an unwonted procedure. Jesus gently reproved her, and the stone was taken away.



A hush fell on all, Jesus raised His eyes and uttered His prayer of thanksgiving to His Father, who had ordered, arranged, and was now about to co-operate in the restoring to life of Lazarus, a miracle that proclaimed Him the Divine Legate of the Almighty, and was intended to convince those present and future generations of His Messianic identity. His prayer ended, Christ, in tones of authority and command, bade Lazarus "come forth" and at once the dead man came back to life.

Such is the simple and pathetic drama that attested the Divinity of Christ and which also sealed His doom.

This wondrous and sensational triumph of our Saviour was a veritable miracle of friendship—that human emotion which plays so prominent and so far-reaching a part in the lives of so many. Of all the influences which come within the scope of the heart of man, none are so marvelous and magnetic, none are so mighty and so mysterious, as that of friendship. We may lay it down as something comparable to an axiom, that a genuine and holy friendship is one of the most ennobling, sacrosanct, and destiny-making influences in the life of man, and it is a psychological factor of consequence for every man of every age and class. "A faithful friend is a strong defence; and he that hath found him, hath found a treasure. Nothing can be compared to a faithful friend, and no weight of gold and silver is able to countervail the goodness of his fidelity" (Ecclus., vi. 14, 15).

Friendship is a precious thing, too precious to be trifled with, and though it may seem a matter of hap-hazard how many friends we have, or whether we have any friends at all, there is a God-given regulation ruling over all. What a blessing to have a wise and judicious companion to whom you can open your heart



freely, and entrust the key to the sanctuary of your innermost self, one to whom you can turn for counsel, consolation and encouragement, one who understands and sympathizes with you, one who, though he knows your failings, yet loves you! Now each one of us is bound to some one or other by many cords that neither time nor eternity can sever, and as the choice of a friend has such a momentous effect, it is important that discretion and not impulse and whim should be exercised in this choice.

Nothing reveals so much what a man really is as his chosen companionship, and I venture to assert that you can scarcely find a more sure, a more trustworthy manifestation of what you really are, than in your associations. Ask yourselves, who are your chosen friends, your boon companions, then you may form a fairly correct idea as to the real state of your mind and heart. If you do not like God-fearing and religious-minded people; if you can enjoy a fling at pious practices; if you take secret delight at finding something wrong or inconsistent in the behavior of one who is regarded as a practical Catholic; if your chosen companions are amongst the gay, the thoughtless, the pleasure-seeking and the worldly; if you prefer the society of the irreligious, dishonest, the backbiter, the intemperate, the impure and the wastrel, and you are uneasy in the company of those who are not so evilly disposed, then you need be in no doubt whatever as to the dangerous road you are traveling. I am quite aware that the exigencies of business, surroundings, and social status bring the good and the bad together, and such connections cannot be avoided without quitting the world altogether; but this contact is not union, is not sympathy, is not chosen friendship.

Here I am speaking of voluntary companionships,



where there is mutual attraction, mutual sympathy, mutual forbearance, mutual help, and where there is reciprocity of taste and feeling, and reciprocity of affection and outlook; and if this friendship does not embrace the good of the soul as well as of the heart, renounce it at once.

If God's voice tells you that a certain most attractive, flattering, and fascinating companionship is in any way hurtful or disadvantageous to your spiritual interests, and is likely to alienate you from your Best of Friends, then break with such a so-called friend, before the consequences become sinful. To state a safe principle to follow in the choice of a friend, any acquaintance is in order, and may be allowed to become intimate, if the characters so drawn together are molded and influenced by the spirit and the ideals of the friendship of Christ, and are rooted in devotion to Him, the Divine Friend.



## XXIII. The Beginning of the World's Greatest Tragedy

AFTER the raising of Lazarus from the dead—a stupendous miracle which among His enemies set a price upon His Head—Jesus retired with His disciples to the little town of Ephrem, which was on the edge of the wilderness, and about sixteen miles north-east of Jerusalem.

In that hiding-place, safe and secure from the jealous rage, the machinations, and the snares of the chief priests and the Pharisees, who in council had finally decreed His death, our Saviour spent the remaining days of His career on earth. While in that peaceful and secluded refuge, He prepared Himself by prayer and meditation for that much longed-for day, when on Calvary the Great Sacrifice was to crown His Life. This retirement also afforded Him the opportunity of giving His disciples further instruction, thus enabling them to become better agents for carrying on the mighty work of His Mission.

When at length the brief time of rest and converse with His disciples at Ephrem had drawn to a close, Christ decided to set out for the last time for Jerusalem. From the conical hill, on which Ephrem was situated, there was a very fine view of the Jordan valley, the Dead Sea, and the whole eastern slope of the country, and as that was the particular time of the year for the various caravans and pilgrims to journey to the Holy City for the Passover, Jesus saw from



those heights the many travelers streaming down the Jordan valley.

His time of seclusion and caution was then past, and as He recognized in the trend of events the manifestation of His Father's Will, He accordingly descended from Ephrem, and joined in with the Galilean pilgrims.

Though that journey was not devoid of interest and incident, it must suffice to mention only one episode, which was the third prediction of His impending Passion and Death.

The striking and startling peculiarity of this revelation was that it gave fuller and clearer particulars of the crowning horror which was to mark the defeat of Satan and the Triumph of God's Kingdom here on earth. Without any warning and in unmistakable terms, He foretold His double betrayal, His condemnation by the Sanhedrin, His being handed over to the Gentiles, who would mock, scourge and crucify Him; and how on the third day He would rise again.

This distressing prophecy was undoubtedly made for the express purpose of preparing the apostles for the blow which was very soon to fall upon them; and at the same time it was to be a further proof of Christ's Divinity. Such a literal prediction showed that our Saviour was fully cognizant of His Father's Will, and this insight and knowledge could be possible only to One who was consubstantial with the Father, and therefore God. Eventually, we find that the caravan of pilgrims which Jesus and His little band had joined, arrived in the vicinity of the Holy City, for we are told that when it reached Bethany, Jesus and His chosen followers parted from the train of Paschal travelers, some of whom went on to Jerusalem where they partook of their friends' hospitality, while



others pitched their tents on the western slopes of Mt. Olivet.

Apparently it was on the Friday evening, six days before the Passover, that Jesus halted within the confines of the city, and took up His abode with His friends Martha, Mary and Lazarus.

It was not only a home for Him, but it was also a very convenient place to stay during the Feast. The day following was the Sabbath, which was spent in quiet, but in the evening a supper was given at the house of Simon the Leper—not of course at that time an actual leper, but who had been such. In all probability Simon had been cured by our Divine Lord, or perhaps he was a friend of some of His disciples. Be that as it may, a supper was given at his house, and Jesus was invited to it.

It was during that memorable repast that Mary Magdalene, the penitent sinner, anointed the head and feet of her dear Master with the precious perfume, which act of devoted sacrifice aroused the disapproval and condemnation of the avaricious Judas Iscariot, the traitor, who under a semblance of charity towards the poor censured this prodigality as foolish.

His plea on behalf of the poor was in reality an argument for satisfying the dishonest and covetous master-passion of his soul, for Judas would have used the money for his own wicked ends. However, the false plea occasioned that time-honored commendation of Mary's act, for Jesus saw in it an exhibition of overflowing love, and as recognition and reward of her manifestations of reverence and affection He promised that they would be remembered through all ages.

This incident was the fatal stumbling block on the downward path of Judas, for that very night he slunk away from Bethany, and began to scheme as to how he



might profit by delivering his Master up to His enemies. For some time past there had been a general impression, amongst the authorities at Jerusalem as well as amongst the people, that Jesus would attend the Paschal Feast. Accordingly, when it was noised abroad that He was at Bethany, a large number of pilgrims, as soon as the Sabbath Law permitted, hurried off to see Jesus, and especially were they anxious to set eyes on Lazarus, and to convince themselves that he was actually alive again.

The Law sanctioned only a thousand paces on a Sabbath, and as Bethany was about a mile east of Jerusalem, the eager throng had to wait until sundown. Having at length satisfied its curiosity, the multitude, many of whom were deeply affected by what they had seen, and moved by enthusiasm and zeal "believed in Jesus," and became His disciples.

This increase in Christ's followers filled the chief priests with even greater animosity, and in their confusion, rage and violence they decided to do away also with Lazarus, because his presence was a living witness to the power of Jesus and emphasized His Divine authority.

On the following day, the day we now commemorate as Palm Sunday, Christ and the Twelve departed from Bethany, and set out for Jerusalem, but instead of taking the high road He chose the foot-path over the Mount of Olives. Soon after leaving His hospitable shelter at Bethany, Jesus dispatched two of His apostles, probably Peter and John, "into the village" of Bethphage. Bethphage, "the House of Figs," was situated upon the slope of Mt. Olivet, and in the immediate neighborhood of Bethany, but where precisely was the site of this village cannot now be ascertained.

It was while approaching Bethphage that Jesus



decided to ride into Jerusalem, and so He bade the two disciples to go hither, telling them that on entering it, they would find an ass tied, and a colt with her, upon which no man yet had sat. These they were to loose and bring to Jesus, and if the owners passed any comment or made any objections, then they were to reply that the Lord needed them. Everything took place as Christ had predicted, for they found the ass and its colt, and permission was readily granted. Now we must remember that amongst the Orientals the ass was ever held in high esteem. The finer breeds were and still are used for riding, while the commoner types play an important part in the farm life, and the ass certainly vies there with the horse in favor.

Amongst the Jews the ass had a peculiar national significance, for it was an ancient symbol of royalty. It was also the emblem of peace, and by no means was it held in such little respect as it is held among us. Every Jew, moreover, expected, from the words of one of the prophets, that the Messiah would enter Jerusalem, poor, and riding on an ass.

“Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Sion, shout for joy, O daughter of Jerusalem, Behold THY KING will come to thee, the just and saviour; He is poor and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass” (Zach., ix. 9).

As the two disciples brought the colt to their Divine Master, two vast streams of people met at the point of the road where the descent of Mt. Olivet may be said to begin. From Bethany came a large number of pilgrims, while another crowd had hastened out from Jerusalem, for the news that the Great Prophet was coming had aroused much enthusiasm and excitement. The disciples were equally enthusiastic, for they took their cloaks, folded them as saddles both for the ass



and the colt; then they helped Jesus mount the latter. The pilgrims took off their garments and spread them on the road—it was customary to lay garments in the path of kings and of rabbis renowned for their holiness and learning. Some cut down branches and strewed them before Him while still others held palm branches in their hands, and going before Jesus they sang in joyful tones: “Blessed is He who cometh in the name of the Lord. . . . Hosanna in the Highest.” The crowd which had advanced from Jerusalem carried the branches of palm, which were used on occasions of festivity as symbols of joy and victory, and it was this section that headed the procession. It was indeed a triumphal march.

This magnificent reception and wild acclamation by the people was a source of great mortification and resentment for the Pharisees. However they did not dare to remonstrate with the joyous throng, and in their confusion they even asked Jesus to rebuke His disciples, but He assured them that “if these shall hold their peace, the stones will cry out” (Luke, xix. 40).

The road from Bethany to Jerusalem led for a while through a slight declivity, but soon the path mounted again, and at that particular angle of the road the Holy City burst suddenly into view, with all its glory.

To Jesus who beheld Jerusalem not only in its majesty, beauty, and security, but who likewise saw down the vista of years, and beheld it destroyed and in desolation, it was an incomparably affecting spectacle, for though He was the Son of God, He was also a son of the Chosen People. Jerusalem in its exquisite splendor stood out in dazzling and wondrous relief against the blue heavens. The City of God, which the Royal Psalmist described as “the joy of the whole



earth," was fair to the eye, for within its shining walls there were quaint, picturesque streets, stately buildings, mighty castles, palaces of sumptuous and extravagant splendor, and to crown the majesty of all, there was the grand Temple, with its courts rising one above the other, with its marble columns, domes, minarets, lofty pinnacles, and its burnished and gilded roofs.

The entire Temple was enclosed by a high wall, in which there were four richly ornamented gates, which bore inscriptions in Latin and Greek, forbidding under penalty of death any one not a Jew to enter.

This city of unrivaled beauty, of glorious memories, and precious associations; the center of the nation's pride and its delight; the dream city of the Chosen People; the City of God, and ancient metropolis of an earthly Theocracy, was the spectacle beheld now by Jesus when amidst pageantry, pomp, and public acclamation He advanced to its walls. Yet, "seeing the city, He wept over it," and wept aloud.

He, its true King, forgot His momentary triumph, He became insensible to the shouts and rejoicing, for He knew what lay beneath that fair exterior, He was aware that the queenly city before Him, overflowing at that hour with untold thousands of pilgrims, was an accursed city. Yes, that Sion of the Prophets was destined to lie in ashes, because it had so persistently and so obdurately despised and set at naught the grace of salvation. He beheld the terrible doom which would chastise the hard-hearted unbelief of those stubborn people; He saw those streets filled with Roman soldiery, as their engines of war did their fell and deadly work; He saw the smoking ruins, the thousands of dead bodies being carried out of the city gates; He saw that proud Temple desecrated and made level



with the ground; and He watched the Roman eagle swooping down upon the smouldering remains. All this He foresaw, because Jerusalem would not receive her Messiah, who was then in her very midst.

Such was to be the dire vengeance for maligned and rejected love, and within forty years that prophecy of Jesus about the doom of Jerusalem was literally and terribly fulfilled.

We must now follow again the procession which swept over the brow of Olivet, down the mountain side, across the brook Kedron, and up the slope to the city gate. Once within the narrow streets of the busy and thronged city which was alive with excitement and enthusiasm at the approach of the Saviour's triumphal procession, the cry from mouth to mouth was: "Who is this? And the people said: This is Jesus, the Prophet, from Nazareth of Galilee" (Matt. xxi. 10, 11). Soon the Temple was reached, and there Jesus alighted. Passing into the hallowed precincts, He found the courts all astir and crowded with traffickers and money-changers, and forthwith He rebuked these noisy defilers of the Temple, and proceeded to drive them out, and not one dared to resist Him.

When order, decency and quiet again prevailed, Jesus took the occasion to address the people; and when nightfall came He and the disciples sought retirement and shelter without the city walls.

On Monday and Tuesday He returned to the city, spending the time in teaching and healing; and in His discourses He told a number of parables, the obvious import of which filled His enemies with madness and fierce determination to seize Him and thus put an end to His unwanted and dangerous presence.

The Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, Highpriest, priests and scribes, were for once eagerly combined in



a common cause; they schemed and conspired; their machinations knew no limit and they thought no device too drastic, as their hatred goaded them on to desperation.

The word Pharisee is derived from *pharash*, i.e., "to separate," and the name was well chosen to designate that sect, whose great ambition and aim in life was to keep themselves aloof from the rest of mankind. They also stood for the preservation of the Law in all its purity and integrity. In order to keep the Law intact, they hemmed it in with an intolerable hedge of regulations and observances which made life an insufferable burden to the people. They were a great power in the State, and they maintained their position of supremacy till the fall of the nation.

This sect arose some eighty years after the return from Babylon. At the time of Christ they were at the height of their power, and they numbered then about 6,000. They were not directly a political party, but rather a religious sect; yet they had the bulk of the people with them, and when they decided on the death of Christ, whose avowed enemy they were, they had the power to carry out their evil plan.

Throughout His public ministry Our Divine Lord paid no heed to the pretensions and fanaticism of the Pharisees. He invariably ignored their "separation" principles, and instead sought every opportunity of associating with the plain people, not excluding sinners, publicans, demoniacs, and outcasts.

He criticized the Pharisees, rebuked their hypocrisy, and reproved their pride and injustices. He even went so far as to denounce them. Was it any wonder, then, that they opposed and hated Him, and plotted His death?

Another sect of the Jewish people very promi-



nent at the time of Christ were the Sadducees. Theirs was a wealthy, aristocratic, priestly caste, whose characteristic was their strict adherence to conservative principles, and strong detestation and abhorrence of any novel doctrine. In most things they were in direct opposition to the Pharisees, though at times necessity induced them to adopt the Pharisaic policy. The High-priests were invariably chosen from this group, and when in the Gospel mention is made of chief priests, it is practically but another way of referring to the Sadducees.

Both these classes were religious sects, but the Pharisees when they sought to ensnare Jesus in His speech, allied themselves also with a political party known as the Herodians. As their name suggests they were "the partisans of Herod," and they were ever ready to promote the interests of the family of Herod. They aided in Romanizing the Jewish Nation, and thereby incurred the hatred and disapproval of the Pharisees.

Whatever may have been the principles and ideals of the Pharisees, Sadducees, the Herodians, and scribes, they became during the closing days of Our Saviour's earthly career united in one common cause, namely to bring about His death. On different previous occasions He had steadfastly met their various attacks, but on the Tuesday of Holy Week, He gave vent to the pent-up criticism of a lifetime, and exposed their hypocritical practices by uttering His eightfold "woe" against them, which made them the scorn and the laughing stock of those who heard the terrible denunciations.

This was the final breach between Christ and His enemies, who now resolved not to lose any time in seeking their revenge. Imagine then their pleasant



surprise, when Judas came to them, and offered to betray His Master for a price!

These harassed leaders of the people, in their recklessness, hatred and vengeance, were resolved to get rid of the Son of God, because of their aversion to Him, and thus it was they became alienated from their Redeemer! Yet can that which was made to comprehend God, think you, be satisfied and happy apart from God—who is the source of all things? To be opposed to God, to shrink from Him; to feel it would be well to be without His presence; to have no sympathy with His holy will or commands; to have no interest in His purposes, such an attitude is but a state of misery. To hate God, to hate goodness, to hate the divine, and to hate salvation, is the very essence of Hell itself. Yet this is the very thing which the rejection of Christ implied.

Alas, we, too, have rejected Christ in our day, we have set at nought His appeals, we have defied His Law, we have sinned and done amiss. We need not look abroad into the world to ascertain the truth of this confession, it will suffice to make a scrutiny of our own hearts. The indifference towards God; the unwelcomeness of the idea of a Supreme Being when it intrudes itself upon our business, or our diversions, and our natural recoil from the Divine holiness and purity give us evidence enough of our alienation from God.

We have given our hearts up to worldly things, our affections have been shown to idols, our devotions have been paid to anything but God, who made us, and who therefore has a claim to our all.

Yes, He made us, soul, body and mind, absolutely for Himself, that we might contemplate Him, hold communion with Him, find blessedness in Him. Yet we have rejected Him. But God is ready to forgive



us if only we will return to Him, and accept His forgiveness, His love and His conditions.

God's mercy is ever with us in every phase of life; it follows us from the first moment that we sinned, until we must lay down the burden of life. God will save us if we will but trust in Him; He will save us from the snares of the devil that are on our every side, for against all these He has provided us with sufficient and sure defense in the frequent reception of the sacraments. Pardon is ours, for Christ has won it for us; peace is ours when God's grace is working in us, and we have God's promise of life everlasting. More than can be conceived, more than can be devised, more than imagination can conjure up, God has done for us.

Beware of trusting to Faith alone, beware of trusting to your religious knowledge, thank God for your Faith, but do not put it in the place of grace. Go to Him again and again for frequent supplies of grace; and remember that without Him you can do nothing.

Trust in Him, trust in His promises. Christ has redeemed us, and has bought us at a great price. Live, therefore as His own, and work your salvation with all your power, that you may live in Him forever.



## XXIV. The Last Supper

At last the end drew near. The Sanhedrin had held its decisive meeting before the Pasch—not in the Temple, as was customary, but at the house of Caiphas, the Highpriest. The purpose of this fateful convocation was to decide how and when to apprehend Jesus, for His enemies were most concerned about avoiding “a tumult among the people” (Mark, xiv. 2).

The time of the Pasch would have been most inopportune and unpropitious for the attempt; hence it had to be made either before or after the feast. The former suggestion was the more expedient, and therefore the more desirable.

During the progress of their intrigues, the situation took a most unexpected turn, which furnished a welcome solution of all their schemes. This unforeseen and opportune turn came when Judas offered to betray Jesus into their hands for the paltry sum of “thirty pieces of silver”—not quite \$20 in American money (or about £4 in English currency).

The traitor Judas was a “man of Kerioth,” hence the name Iscariot. Kerioth was a small town in Judea, and thus by a remarkable coincidence, Jesus the Betrayed and Judas the Betrayer hailed from the same province. Judas was the only Apostle who was not a Galilean, and when our Divine Lord chose him to be one of the Twelve, there must have been in him great promise and possibilities of good. Like the rest of the Apostles, he shared in the labors, hardships and poverty of the discipleship. Enjoying as he did the influences of



Christ's company, witnessing so many of His mighty miracles, sharing in His missionary activities, and receiving such constant proofs of His love, it is difficult to understand how he came to betray his Divine Master. Amongst the motives which led to the terrible crime, avarice is usually assigned as the chief cause of his vile act of disloyalty. At any rate, on the Wednesday of Holy Week, we are told that "Satan entered into Judas," and, once he became the tool of the Evil One, there was no limit to his perfidy. He had become estranged from Jesus; what then could check him in his foul purpose?

This act of treachery, and a further prediction of His Passion and Death, were the events on that Wednesday, which Jesus passed in seclusion with His Apostles. On Thursday morning our Blessed Saviour bade Peter and John go and make preparations for the Pasch. They, no doubt, expected that Jesus would not venture into Jerusalem for the paschal festivities because of His adversaries and their machinations, therefore they asked Him where He wished them to make the necessary arrangements. They apparently felt that He might keep the feast at Bethany, which would have been quite lawful, as this village was reckoned by the Rabbis as part of Jerusalem. But His intention was otherwise, for He had resolved to visit once more the Holy City—that city which was so dear to Him.

As our Divine Saviour was in constant peril at that time, it was but natural that He should wish to celebrate the paschal supper in secrecy and to avoid all possible chance of intrusion on the part of His enemies. He thus designated, by a special sign, the place where the supper was to be taken. He told Peter and John that on entering the city they would meet "a man



carrying a pitcher of water," who would lead them to the particular house where He desired to celebrate the Pasch. They were then to tell the owner of the house that it was their Master's intention to "keep the pasch" there with His disciples, whereupon a room would be put at their disposal. Some writers have conjectured that the "master of the house" was Nicodemus; others that it was Joseph of Arimathea, and still others that it was the father of St. Mark, who was probably a secret disciple of our Lord. Peter and John then started for Jerusalem, found everything as Jesus had foretold, and "prepared the Pasch" in a large room, which was already suitably furnished for the supper to be held there that night.

The Pasch was the greatest of the Jewish festivals, and it was observed on the fourteenth of the first month (called Nisan), which was equivalent to our March or April. The Jewish year originally consisted of 354 days, but as this mode of reckoning created difficulty in assigning the feasts to the same date each year, it was found necessary to add an extra month at least once in three years. At the time of Christ the Jews had apparently no fixed chronological calendar, and this will account, no doubt, for the diversity of opinion as to the precise day of the month when Jesus celebrated the Pasch. The great feast of the Pasch was to commemorate the redemption of the Israelites from the bondage in Egypt, and the preservation of the Jewish first-born on that memorable night when all the first-born of the Egyptians were slain by the destroying angel.

The derivation of the word "Pasch" is uncertain, but as the Assyrian language contains a word not unlike it which means "to propitiate," this perhaps may be its interpretation. Prior to the feast there were many



preparations to be made: for instance, the roads and the bridges had to be repaired, the flocks and herds were tithed, and explanations of the significance and the rites of the festival were given to the people in the synagogues and public assemblies. Every adult Jew had to attend the celebration of the Pasch in Jerusalem, and though the immense crowds which flocked to Jerusalem for the feast were never accurately estimated, the figures of Josephus—who states that in A.D. 65 some 3,000,000 persons attended—seem exaggerated.

The Passover, properly so called, began on the evening of the 14th of Nisan, and continued for eight days, during which only unleavened bread (that is bread which contained no yeast) was allowed to be eaten. So strict was the ruling on this matter that the Jews carefully searched the houses lest any crumbs of leavened bread should be overlooked.

On the solemnity of the Pasch the whole priestly body was in attendance at the Temple. After a lamb had been killed, one of the priests caught the blood in a bowl, the contents of which was eventually emptied at the foot of the altar. Meanwhile some Psalms were recited, the Levites leading, and the people repeating certain parts.

The lambs brought by the people were then killed and hung upon iron hooks attached to the walls and pillars of one of the Temple courts, and then skinned and cut open. Some portions were set aside for sacrificial purposes, the rest was taken home by the people. Great care was necessary in cooking the lamb: no bone of it was to be broken, no part was to be taken out of the house where the feast was held, and none of it was to be left over. Each guest had to be provided with a cup of red wine mixed with water, and even the poor



were not exempted from this observance, nor those who commonly abstained from wine; in fact, even young persons had to partake of this drink. Once the sun had set and the stars had begun to appear, the repast might begin.

Accordingly on the Thursday, when the shadows of evening began to fall, Jesus accompanied by the Twelve left Bethany, and came to the house where Peter and John had prepared the Paschal Supper, which was to be their farewell meal with Jesus after three happy years spent in His company. When they arrived in the upper room, all was ready for the meal, the table spread, so that they had only to take their places on the cushions, which were set around three sides. Jesus took the first place, and, as He gazed upon the disciples reclining about Him, He could no longer contain His overwhelming emotion, and gave utterance to those memorable words: "With desire I have desired to eat this Pasch with you before I suffer" (Luke, xxii. 15). We may assume that He thrilled with joy because it was to be followed by the institution of the Holy Eucharist, and, on the other hand, He was saddened by the thought of parting.

Is it not passing strange that when the disciples were about to take their places, they should dispute amongst themselves over precedence, with an eagerness which sprang from rivalry rather than from affection? This misplaced ambition led Jesus to dispel from their minds the foolish and earthly notions of preferment, by pointing out that glory must give place to humility, ease to service, and self-seeking to election.

Then, joining action to His words, He rose "from supper," took off His cloak, girded Himself with a towel, poured "water into a basin," and performed the



meanest office of hospitality by washing the feet of His disciples.

The startling and sublime humility of this act of stooping to wash the feet of His creatures was too much for Peter, who feeling the incongruity of the situation, refused to let Jesus wash his feet, saying: "Thou shalt never wash my feet" (John, xiii. 8).

This Divine humility and excessive love had confused the impetuous Apostle, but Jesus looked at him, and said in tones that thrilled the heart of His faithful disciple: "If I wash thee not, thou shalt not have part with Me" (John, xiii. 8), thereby emphasizing that such reluctance would separate him from his Master. Then, with his usual impulsiveness and apparent alarm, Peter goes to the other extreme, and demands that Jesus should wash not only his feet, but also his hands and head.

After this voluntary humiliation and loving self-abasement our Blessed Lord made known His knowledge of the hypocrisy and villainy of Judas. Having washed the feet of His disciples, He once more resumed His place at the head of the table and He addressed them on the duty of humility and self-effacement. Feeling was at high tension among the Apostles, and hence a moment of supreme surprise and sadness followed when Jesus said: "Amen, amen, I say to you, one of you shall betray me" (John, xiii. 21). The disciples were dumbfounded, and in their dismay and consternation "began to inquire among themselves, which of them it was that should do this thing." And they began every one to say: "Is it I, Lord?" Even the traitor ventured to ask "Is it I, Rabbi?" and Christ answered: "Thou hast said it." His guilt thus revealed, Judas went out into the darkness of the night. Whether this dramatic incident preceded the institution of the



Holy Eucharist or not, is open to conjecture. The hour had come for the fulfilment of the great promise made by our Divine Lord at Capharnaum a year previously, when He said that He would give His flesh to eat and His blood to drink. Accordingly, taking bread in His hands, He gave thanks, brake it, and gave it His disciples, saying: "Take ye and eat, THIS IS MY BODY, which is given for you. Do this for a commemoration of Me." Then taking the cup (chalice) filled with wine, He gave thanks, and after He had supped, He gave to them, saying: "Drink ye all of this. For this is My blood of the new testament, which shall be shed for many unto remission of sins" (Matt., xxvi. 27-28).

These distinct consecrations changed the substance of the bread and wine, really, truly and substantially into the Body and Blood of Christ, and the Apostles took the transubstantiation in a literal sense, and such is the belief of the Catholic Church ever since. The New Commandment of Love culminated in the Sacrifice of Love, and it is fitting that we take to heart the significance of this sublime memorial of love.

In the early ages of the Church, the bonds of love united the Christians so closely that the pagans pointed to them with an exclamation of wonder: "Behold, how these Christians love one another!" There was no idea of class distinction or jealousy amongst them, for love was the mainspring of all their actions, and the bedrock of all their principles. This one might be a fisherman, this a tent-maker, this a slave, and this a centurion. What mattered such distinctions here? Were they not all Christians—children of the same God? Now come down to our own highly cultured age of civilization, and take this professedly Christian country, and what do we find? Undoubtedly, there are bonds of a utilitarian policy or self-preserva-



tion, and schemes for the amelioration and the advancement of the working class, while every now and then we hear of philanthropists offering lavish gifts or expending huge sums on the people. But are these deeds prompted by a Christ-like love? The highest philosophy of the heathen world included love of truth, of temperance, of justice, of civic virtue; but it found no room for that love which St. Paul styles "the bond of perfection," and which St. John speaks of when he says: "God is love." Of course there is the natural love of one man for another, a natural and selfish affection. There is the love of our own countrymen, who are nearer and dearer to us than others because they are born of the same blood, reared on the same soil, and grow up under the same laws in common intercourse and common life. There is a closer and nearer love still—the love of those who are members of the same family, taught at the same mother's knee, and nurtured in the same home. There is the love between husband and wife, parent and child. But all this love is purely natural, and demands not the heroism which should characterize a Christ-like love. But if you take a cup of cold water in your hands, and give it to one famishing with thirst, and God sees that it comes from love, He will reward you eternally. If you drop your mite into a beggar's hand from a heart full of love, your Heavenly Father will bless your memory. If you even utter a sigh over suffering, and it is a good act for the sake of God, or offer a prayer in silence and from real love, it is credited to your account for ever.

How much greater will then be the reward of those who make sacrifices for the love of God, who even devote their very lives to the service of human kind for the love of God, who even brave danger and death to relieve the sufferings of stricken mankind or to bring



consolation and relief to the suffering. Truly "God is love," and our deeds, large or small, that come from Christ-like love are acceptable to Him, and are rewarded by Him a thousandfold. All our good works must have the element of divine love in them if they are to help us to attain our eternal salvation.



## XXV. The Agony, The Arrest, The Condemnation

Rising from the table at the midnight hour, Jesus and His few faithful followers passed out of the Upper Room into the street, and out of the town by the eastern gate of the city.

On they went silent and sad, and eventually they came to that lonely quarter where the brook Cedron, running at the foot of Mount Olivet, forms a deep gorge on the east side of Jerusalem.

Cedron means "Black Brook," the name being due to the black waters, which in the winter time swelled into a torrent, and which "were still more darkened by the blood of the sacrifices that flowed into it from the temple-mount."

Across this brook, and somewhat to the left, was an olive orchard, known to us as Gethsemane, where again and again our Divine Lord had found a sure retreat.

The name Gethsemane signifies "oil-press," and was doubtless derived from the fact that it contained a rock-hewn trough where the olives from the countless trees hard by were crushed by the feet, the oil flowing into a press below.

Jesus turned aside into this quiet and now hallowed garden, where under the heavy shade of the trees there was an unbroken solitude, and was not such a spot a most fitting resort, for olives are the emblem of peace? A square stone-walled orchard or garden, which lies close by the path to Bethany, is now identified as the



site. Here venerable olive-trees are still cherished and tended with care, for tradition has claimed them to be the very witnesses of Christ's agony, although this is a most improbable contention. In retirement and prayer Jesus had prepared Himself for the beginning of His public ministry; in retirement and prayer He now prepares Himself to crown that wondrous career.

Following the winding pathway into the depths of the garden, He bade His disciples sit down, while He withdrew to some distance away, taking with Him Peter, James and John.

These three had witnessed their Master's glory on Thabor; they were now to witness His agony and humiliation in Gethsemane. Scarcely was He alone with them than the pent-up sorrow and mental anguish gave place to a cruel and crushing torture. Great drops of blood gathered on His Divine brow: pain in its acutest form, desolation with its overwhelming pangs, seized Him; the burden and the immensity of man's sins pressed Him down; the horror and the shame of the anticipated Passion and Death, and the apparent abandonment and stupefaction of soul overmastered Him, as though the Divinity no longer sustained Him. During that terrible conflict and tumult of emotion, in which the God-Man experienced the uttermost agony, He cried out: "My Soul is sorrowful even unto death: stay you here and watch with Me" (Matt., xxvi. 38). Then withdrawing Himself from all external consolation, He retired a little further, and dragged Himself as far as "the grotto, which is since called the grotto of the Agony." First kneeling, then falling on His face, He prayed aloud, saying: "My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me. Nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt" (Matt., xxvi. 39). As Man, He wished to be spared the bitter



cup of suffering, which God in His power could have taken from Him; yet, no matter how great the ordeal, He still submitted with absolute resignation to whatever the Will of His heavenly Father had ordained.

Weary with the conflict, shaken with fear and broken with agony, the Man of Sorrows rose to His feet, and dragged Himself to the spot where He had left the beloved three. He sought them to find comfort, sympathy and support, but instead He found them sleeping. He reproached them, addressing His rebuke to Peter, the one indeed, who had promised so much, warning him and the others thus: "What? Could you not watch one hour with Me? Watch ye, and pray that ye enter not into temptation" (Matt., xxvi. 40-41).

Thrice He prayed in the self-same fashion, and thrice He turned from His prayer to seek human solace and succor from His most trusted and long-tried three, but on every occasion He found them sleeping. They failed Him, and failed Him miserably in His hour of infinite grief.

During His awful agony and dereliction they had slept, but now that it was over, comfort and strength came to Him from on high. Recovering His composure and His serenity, He bade His disciples take their rest ere the betrayer came upon them, for that terrible moment was not far distant. This period of rest was to be brief, for Jesus who was already aware of the approach of His enemies, very soon told His disciples to "rise up" as the traitor was at hand.

As He was yet speaking the heavy tramp of the soldiers could be heard, while the light of the lanterns and the torches flashing through the olive grove, and the excited murmurs of the crowd also indicated that Judas and his band were approaching.

The arch-traitor was at the head of the motley



throng, who had armed themselves with swords and clubs, as though they were hunting down some vile and treacherous criminal.

However, Judas and his satanic accomplices had utterly misjudged their victim, for they were about to accost and arrest One who was not only gentleness itself, but who was also deserted and defenceless.

The sign previously agreed upon for the capture of Jesus was a kiss from the infamous miscreant.

As the rabble neared the garden, Judas advanced to where Jesus was standing, and saluted His Master in friendly greeting, saying: "Hail, Rabbi." *And he kissed Him!* Instead of repelling or condemning the guilty Apostle, Jesus humbly submitted to the indignity and profanation, and calmly asked: "Friend, whereto art thou come? Judas, dost thou betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" Then ignoring His renegade disciple, Jesus approached the bewildered emissaries, and asked them: "Whom seek ye?" They answered: "Jesus of Nazareth." With characteristic candor He replied: "I am He." His kingly composure and dignity so overawed and paralyzed the crowd that in their terror and confusion they recoiled and fell on the ground before Him.

After they had risen, and while they stood there cowering and perplexed, Christ again asked them: "Whom seek ye?" On repeating their former answer, He said: "I have told you, that I am He, therefore; if you seek Me, let these go their way"—thereby showing that He did not wish the Eleven to be implicated.

Forthwith the emissaries of the Sanhedrin laid hold of Jesus. Then followed the only act of violence, for Peter seeing that His Master was about to be led away captive drew his sword and severed the ear of a man



named Malchus, who was a servant of the Highpriest. Christ rebuked this display of physical force, and declared that He did not need any intervention, after which He healed the ear of Malchus.

The soldiers now seized Jesus, tied His hands behind His back, and forming a close guard around Him, led Him a prisoner into the still silent city, while the disciples, giving up all idea of resistance, took to flight. He was brought in haste to the house of Annas, the ex-Highpriest and the father-in-law of Caiphas, who was the Highpriest of that time. Here we must recall that Jesus had three distinct judicial examinations, or rather three mock trials, since the whole proceedings were characterized by crafty double-dealing and monstrous illegality.

He was first arraigned before Annas, who was of the priestly line, and though deposed by the Romans, nevertheless was still acknowledged by the Jews as having *de jure*, if not *de facto* the power of the high-priesthood.

The name Annas signifies "merciful," but his snake-like craft, his notorious avarice, his all-powerful and corrupt influence, his spirit of arrogance, injustice, and vindictiveness, not only made him an object of general execration, but also made it evident that his real nature was the very antithesis of his name.

Why precisely Jesus was first brought to the expontiff, is not known, but it has been suggested that Annas was somewhat anxious to play a leading part in the proceedings. Yet it may have been that his palace was nearer to the place where our Divine Lord had been arrested. Only a very short halt was made at the house of Annas, and no account is given of what passed there. We next find the Divine Prisoner being led captive to the palace of the Highpriest Caiphas,



which was situated on Mount Sion, and like all princely mansions "was composed of a central block, flanked by two wings."

Joseph Caiphas had retained priestly office for quite a number of years, and this was no doubt due to his being a very satisfactory and submissive agent of the Roman policy. Though he did not possess the same strong character as his father-in-law, he was equally intriguing and unscrupulous. He was at the head of the commission before which Jesus was brought for further trial, and which consisted mainly of chief priests, scribes and ancients. This Council or the Sanhedrin was the supreme court of the Jews at the time of Christ, and, though held in high repute, it was now about to disgrace itself for ever.

The president of the tribunal was Caiphas the Highpriest; Annas and the other representatives of the priestly nobility and of the Pharisaic doctors were also members, and during any legal business all sat in a semicircle so that they could see one another. The full conclave consisted of seventy-one members, but twenty-three formed a quorum which was deemed sufficient to constitute a tribunal. In voting each member stood up, and though acquittal could be pronounced on the same day as the trial, the sentence of condemnation had to be passed on the day following. To proceed in a strict legal fashion, very careful investigations had to be made on particular points and circumstances which might in any way prove the innocence of the accused party. Witnesses had very serious and exacting obligations; thus they were to be duly warned of the gravity of their responsibilities, impressed with the importance of speaking the truth and nothing but the truth, and they were never permitted to give evidence in the presence of each other, while the testi-



mony of two witnesses on any specific point had to be unanimous.

Obviously then, the trial of Jesus was an appalling and unpardonable miscarriage of justice, a woeful exhibition of illegality, and an atrocious piece of mockery from beginning to end; and to add further outrage to the farcical anomaly, the Sanhedrin conducted their judicial inquiry at an unwarranted hour, as it was never allowable to try any one for a capital offence during the night. The rulings and the requirements of the rabbinical law were all defiantly set aside or violated; the evidence of false witnesses was cited; none of the charges were substantiated; impartiality and fair play were foreign to the whole judicial inquiry, so there was no legal justification or semblance of justice in the verdict passed on the Prisoner. Hence the tribunal was guilty of murder.

Jesus was first questioned about His disciples and His doctrines. However, passing over the allusion to His disciples, He did not fail to remind the Highpriest that the question pertaining to His teaching could be best answered by those who had heard Him. Evidently our Lord intended to direct the Highpriest as to his duty, and to make the court realize that it was their task to prove Him guilty, because His answer was taken as a rebuke, as the following incident shows.

That Jesus should challenge the bench, was taken as a fresh offence, so much so that one of the attendants gave Him a blow on the face, and insultingly said: "Answerest thou the Highpriest so?"

This in no way disturbed the calm self-possession and dignity of Jesus, who proceeded to avow the justice of His cause, saying: "If I have spoken evil, give testimony of the evil: but if well, why striketh thou Me?"



In spite of such evidence as they brought forward, in spite of all duplicity and chicanery, they could find no ground for condemnation. To give some foundation to the charge of sedition, two false witnesses were now called, and they alleged that they had heard Jesus boast that He would destroy the Temple, and then after three days rebuild it.

To this charge the Divine Prisoner made no answer, so the accusation broke down. This silence threw Caiphas into a paroxysm of fear, fury and despair, as he felt that the victim might escape their clutches. It was while in this terrible dilemma that he hit upon a most shrewd expedient. Setting aside all principles of Hebrew Law which stated that no one was to be condemned to death on his own confession, he flung a challenge to Jesus, knowing full well that it would force an answer, and an answer which would be incriminating. Accordingly with emphasis and fiendish glee, the Highpriest demanded of Jesus that He should declare in the name of the living God, whether or not He was the Messiah, the Son of God.

Jesus replied: "I am." In this solemn declaration He clearly avowed and unconditionally assumed the title of Messiah, God, Saviour of the world, and equality with the Father, and in the eyes of His enemies such a claim was blasphemy pure and simple. What more was needed? The Divine Prisoner had exalted Himself to the sublimity of God. He was guilty of the most atrocious and unparalleled blasphemy, and was worthy of death. Therefore they condemned Him. Meanwhile Peter and John had recovered from their first panic, and, being anxious to see what would happen to their Master, eventually succeeded in getting into the outer court. Peter's presence was soon perceived, with the result that on three



occasions he was accused of being a disciple of the Prisoner, and each time he denied the charge. On the third denial he recalled the prophetic words of His Divine Master, who had said: "Before the cock crows twice, thou shalt deny Me thrice." Whereupon he rushed out into the night.

In the morning the Sanhedrin proceeded again in an apparently legal fashion to get Jesus to reiterate His claim to Divinity, and, once they had satisfied themselves of His stupendous contention, they passed sentence. Jesus was then led to Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor of Palestine.

The iniquity of His enemies condemned the Son of God to death, and such deep debasement seems almost incredible. Yet we share in the guilt of that act of vile ingratitude and treachery, for it was our sins that condemned Him to die.

It is well to realize and ponder over this personal responsibility of ours for the sorrows, humiliations and death of our Crucified Saviour, for then perhaps the memory and the horror of our sins will make us more penitent, and arouse our shame and regret.

At the same time, we must not become victims of depression and despair, as, no matter how heinous or how numerous be our offences and crimes, God is ever ready to forgive—nay more, He is ever pleading and endeavoring to make us seek His forgiveness. Where sin hath abounded, there will grace much more abound, and however aggravated our sins have been, so much more abundant is the mercy of God.

Surely, no one is foolish enough to imagine that the Evil One can hold his own with our all-merciful Father!

Perhaps indeed, there is some one here who is actually saying: "O yes, all this talk about grace,



mercy and forgiveness is very fine, and sounds very affecting in the pulpit, but it has no personal concern for me, as my case is beyond redemption.

“Besides, even if I did summon up the energy and courage to go to confession, I would not know where to begin, as I have committed so many sins! As a matter of fact, what good would it do? I would fall into the same sins again. And while I know that the Mercy of God is infinite, I also know that His justice is equally so.”

“If I were only fainthearted or a little neglectful, then I would gladly go to Him to get strengthened; but alas! I am vile, steeped in sin, and beyond amendment.”

To any such sinner, I would say: “No doubt you are shrewd enough in things of worldly concern; you are sharp and interested in business, and I will guarantee that a rival of yours would have to get up very early in the morning to catch you napping. In a word, when it is a matter of the mighty dollar, then you are all you should be.

“Yet, when it is a question of sin, your cleverness, shrewdness and keen concern are woefully lacking, and you are willing to expose yourself to a loss, which is not only irremediable but eternal.

“As a citizen, you seek and strive for independence; as an heir to the kingdom of heaven, you sell your birthright, and willingly submit to a bondage which is an intolerable oppression and the vilest slavery. Think too of the choice you are making, when you continue in the state of sin.

“On the one hand, there is at the worst a few minutes’ confusion and humiliation in confession; while on the other there is unending woe and retribution to be continued as long as God is God.”



## XXVI. The Undying Tragedy

UPON a charge of blasphemy, the Sanhedrin unanimously passed sentence on the Son of God, but, as they had no authority to put Him to death, they had to lay the case before the Roman Governor.

Accordingly, early on Friday morning, Jesus was once more securely bound and led to the official residence of Pontius Pilate.

The chief priests, elders and scribes, no doubt with Annas and Caiphas at their head, accompanied their God and Messiah to the quarters of the Roman authorities.

Pontius Pilate, who was then in office, was the sixth to hold the post of Roman Procurator, and, though he usually resided at Cæsarea, he repaired to Jerusalem on the occasion of the great Jewish festivals, as his presence there was necessary on account of the great crowds.

In the Holy City he had a magnificent and most luxuriant abode—doubtless the former palace of Herod, as it was the custom of the Roman Officials when sent into conquered dominions to occupy the residence of the displaced sovereign. The Imperial Palace was on the Temple Hill, and commanded a glorious view of Jerusalem. Like all palatial abodes of those times, it could boast of stately porticos and columns, exquisite ornaments and sculptures, marble and mosaic apartments, kingly suites, immense courts, a garden surpassing all description, and countless evidences of wealth and luxury.



Externally, it was a huge structure of massive proportions, which with its lofty walls and formidable towers not only formed a magnificent residence, but also an impregnable fortress where the Governor and his soldiers could reside in inviolable security.

Pilate was a typical Roman, fond of pleasure, haughty, skeptical and superstitious, and a veritable devotee of the corrupt morals of that age. He despised the Jews, their religion and its rigorous formalities so much so that, in their exasperation and bitterness, they had even petitioned the Emperor to remove him.

Such then was the Procurator who held office when Jesus was brought before the Roman court for the final stages of His trial. In his palace there was a hall, in which all trials were generally conducted, but as the Jewish authorities did not wish to incur defilement by passing over the threshold of a Gentile during the Paschal Feast, and thus be unable to take part in the solemnities, "Pilate, therefore, went out to them."

Then began the examination. The first and natural question was to ask the chiefs of the Sanhedrin what were their charges, which seems to have amazed them somewhat, for they coolly replied that if the Prisoner had not been a rebel and a criminal, they would never have dreamt of bringing Him to account.

To their accusation Pilate calmly and arrogantly retorted that, if such was the case, they had better go and try Him according to their own law; whereupon they quickly reminded him that they had no authority to put anyone to death, and to leave the judge no loophole for escape, they detailed a formidable list of capital charges. They stated that Jesus was a "malefactor," that He had perverted the nation, forbidden tribute to Caesar, and even claimed to be a



King. This array of charges was of course flagrantly false and preposterously unwarranted, yet, as is evident, the Sanhedrin expected that Pilate would be satisfied with this condemnatory indictment, and would thereupon, without further inquiry, sanction their murderous designs.

Obviously Pilate distrusted them, and being determined not to hand Jesus over to death untried and uncondemned, gave orders that the Prisoner be brought into the palace court. There he began to cross-examine Him. He asked Jesus if He was the King of the Jews, whereupon our Lord replied that He was, though His kingdom was not of this world. Continuing, He gave the motives of His sojourn here below, and how He had come "to give testimony to the truth."

Satisfied that there was no ground for condemnation, and probably regarding Jesus as a visionary or harmless fanatic, Pilate strode out of the palace again, and emphatically announced that he had found no cause for condemnation. This threw the Rabbis and the priests into a fury, and, in their fiendish madness and their thirst for blood, they excitedly hurled charge upon charge to confirm their former accusation. And to all this hailstorm of condemnation Jesus made no reply.

Amid the uproar, confusion and wild disappointment of the crowd, fresh complaints and threats were howled out against the innocent Jesus, declaring Him to be a seditious fellow who upset the people by His teaching "throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee to this place."

Pilate was most anxious and on the alert for an opportunity to release Jesus, if only he could at the same time devise some expedient for appeasing the



Jewish deicides. Imagine then his satisfaction and relief when he learned that Jesus was from Galilee, and therefore came under the jurisdiction of Herod. Glad to get rid of a troublesome responsibility, he dispatched the Prisoner to Herod Antipas, who was highly flattered and decidedly gratified to have the privilege of confronting the Wonder-worker about Whom he had heard not a little, and by Whom he expected to "see some miracles wrought."

The dissolute Tetrarch and incestuous husband of Herodias questioned and harangued his Captive, but all to no purpose, for our Divine Lord answered not a word to the vulgar and vile voluptuary. Baffled, keenly disappointed and humiliated, Herod thought it well to make fun of the defenceless Galilean, and bade his soldiers array our Saviour in a white robe, and thus subject and expose Him to all kinds of ribald derision and profane buffoonery. When this sacrilegious mockery was ended, the Victim was led back to Pilate.

His attempt to save Jesus having failed, Pilate proposed as a compromise to the Jews that, as both Herod and himself had found no cause for condemnation, he would scourge the "Man," and then "release Him."

This proposal came to nought, doubtless because Pilate also mentioned what he must have deemed a conciliatory concession.

There was a time-honored Jewish custom to set a prisoner free during the paschal festivities, and this ancient procedure at once suggested to the Governor the desirability of granting pardon to the accused Galilean. How and when this act of clemency at the Pasch became customary, is not known, but some have regarded it as a reminiscence and record of the joy of their forefathers, when the Israelites were freed from



the Egyptian bondage. Now it so happened that, when Pilate recalled this loophole of escape, there was a condemned notorious criminal called Barabbas, who had been guilty of robbery, sedition and murder. Feeling quite confident that such a scoundrel would merit the popular condemnation, the Roman Governor asked the excited rabble which prisoner they would have him release.

Accordingly, he gave the mob a choice, Barabbas or Jesus, but they at the instigation of their religious leaders clamored most vehemently for the liberation of the robber and rebel, and with one accord they fiercely demanded that the Innocent One should be crucified.

Three times did Pilate appeal to the frenzied rabble, asking them what he should do with Christ, Whom he styled "King of the Jews," but each cowardly and blustering act of duplicity only occasioned a wilder and wilder howl of: "Crucify Him, crucify Him."

With reluctant subserviency Pilate the time-server acceded to their blood-thirsty demands, but, in evidence of his repudiation of all responsibility, he took water and washed his hands.

During this symbolical act of innocence, he publicly avowed that the guilt was on the Jews, and not on himself. To this protestation the seething throng yelled back: "His blood be upon us and upon our children." This hell-ridden curse found its actual fulfillment some years later, for all the humiliation, cruelty and punishment which they inflicted on Jesus, were likewise meted out to them, when Titus and his brutal soldiery besieged Jerusalem.

Pilate then released Barabbas, and ordered their God to be scourged. This revolting torture was the ordinary preliminary to crucifixion. The ill-fated victim was stripped to the waist, was bound in a stoop-



ing position to some post or pillar, and then on the "tense quivering nerves" of the naked back, was lashed unmercifully with leaden thongs, which were weighted with jagged pieces of lead or sharp-pointed bones.

Once this lacerating agony of barbarity was over, the Man of Sorrows was subjected to more human wickedness, being led half-naked to some inner court of the palace, where low coarse soldiery vented their brutal humor and derision. These profligate guards went through a mock coronation and mock investiture and offered mock allegiance. They threw over the quivering and torn shoulders of Jesus a scarlet military cloak; upon His head they placed a wreath of tough thorny twigs, and, to give a final and complete touch to their derisive savagery, they put in His hand a long reed as a make-believe sceptre. Then they paid Him a show of homage, bending their knees, saying: "Hail, King of the Jews," and added to their wanton coarseness by striking Him on the face and head.

After this base and heartless parody, Pilate still "sought to release" Jesus—"the most abject of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with infirmity," as Isaias in prophetic vision had described Him—but the irrepressible and infuriated mob only redoubled their yell of: "Crucify Him, crucify Him! . . . Away with Him, away with Him!" At last their diabolic intrigue and murderous resolve prevailed, and Pilate taking the deicides at their word, passed sentence and delivered the Victim to them to be crucified. Hence we say "suffered under Pontius Pilate."

As soon as the condemnation had been pronounced, the Man of Sorrows was handed over to the soldiers to be led to the place of execution. Originally crucifixion was an Oriental form of punishment, and such an



ignominious and unspeakably horrible death was meted out only to slaves, revolutionaries and criminals of the lowest type. From the court-room, Jesus was taken into the courtyard, where the soldiers tore off the purple cloak from His lacerated body, and arrayed Him again in His own garments.

It was customary for the victims to carry their own instruments of death to the place of execution, and even the Innocent One did not refuse to carry His cross which was brutally thrown over His wounded and aching shoulders. The infamous gibbet was doubtless made of ordinary wood (perhaps olive or sycamore), shaped as we generally know it, but whether it had a support for the feet, is an unsettled question. A vast crowd surged around the Prætorium to watch Jesus, as, with the other two unfortunate wretches who were to be crucified with Him, He set out on His journey of suffering and shame.

What precise route they took is not known, for, even though it was common to take the longest road to the place of execution, it is vain to attempt to conjecture about it, for the whole surface of Jerusalem has changed since then. All we know is that the tragedy was enacted outside the walls.

The enfeebled and exhausted state of Jesus made Him stagger under the weight of the cross, and was it any wonder then that He fell several times? Fearing He would die on the way, the soldiers who were escorting Him seized a man by the name of Simon, a Cyrenian—who apparently was coming in the opposite direction—and compelled him to help Jesus to carry His cross. Evidently the pitiable state of our suffering Saviour aroused the sympathy of a group of women, but, ever forgetful of Self, He bade them not to weep on His account, but to weep for themselves and



their posterity upon whom the terrible chastisements of God were to fall. This prophetic utterance was verified in a most alarming fashion some years later.

It is worthy of note that this was the only utterance that came from the Divine lips on the way to Calvary. Not a cry of pain, not a murmur of impatience, not a call for assistance escaped Him, as with faltering step and wellnigh dead with exhaustion and pain He dragged Himself to the place of execution. The name Calvary—or Golgotha as it is in Hebrew—signifies skull, but why it was so designated we cannot say. On arrival at the place of execution, it was the custom to give the victim a drugged drink, the effect of which was to diminish if not kill the agony of the dreadful torture; but though it was offered to Jesus, He declined to accept it.

At once the cross was laid on the ground, Jesus was stripped of His garments, a linen cloth at most being left round His loins. Then stretching Him on the infamous gibbet, the executioners began their inhuman work of driving the huge nails through the hands and feet, thus making His whole body quiver with agony inconceivable, as they tore their way through the quivering flesh. It was probably at this juncture that our loving Lord and Saviour besought His heavenly Father to have compassion on His cruel murderers, saying: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

The inscription or title which was on a white wooden tablet, and which had been borne by Him on the journey to Calvary, was fixed on the cross over His thorn-crowned Head. This was written in Latin, Greek and Hebrew, and read as follows: "The King of the Jews." The soldiers slowly raised the Cross aloft, and then dropped it with a terrible jolt into



the socket, thereby rending anew every nerve and muscle.

As He hung there dying and consumed by the horrible torture of His intense agony, mocked by His enemies and deserted by His disciples, "there stood by the cross . . . His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene." Seven times during His lingering doom, He gave a message from the cross, and when at length the sixth hour had run its course, He bowed His Head and died.

Joseph of Arimathea obtained permission from the Governor to lay the Body in his own sepulchre, which was hewn out of a rock, and which was not far away from Calvary. Fearing that the disciples might come and steal away the Body of the dead Christ, the Sanhedrin besought Pilate to have a guard placed at the sepulchre, but he bade them see to that themselves, and so they "made the sepulchre secure with guards, sealing the stone."

Thus was the work of man's redemption accomplished, and it is well that we pause to consider the price paid by the God-Man for that redemption. I need not lead you through the sad scenes of that dreadful sacrifice. We know what passed in Gethsemane; we have witnessed His mock trials; we have been to Calvary, and we have seen how He drained to the last drop the bitterness of the cup, that our souls might be healed. We know all this, but even so I must ask a question: "If any man had suffered only a fraction of what our Saviour had endured for us—nay, if perchance we had been even the involuntary cause of his agony and death—would we not feel indebted to him, and would not gratitude prompt us to do at least something which we would feel to be his reasonable wish?"

Christ the Son of God worked, suffered and died



for us, or rather He poured out His very soul in torture and shame for our sins. He seeks no recompense except that we avoid sin and its occasion, and that, if we do fall, we return to Him at once with the true spirit of penitence and earnest resolve. This will make amends for His sufferings, and what is more this will fully satisfy Him.

Had God opened and revealed the way of salvation, and left it to our choice to follow it, it would have been as much as we could have hoped for, and far more than we had deserved. But He has done more—much more—ininitely more than this.

He against whom we have sinned, has not only offered pardon, but urged and entreated us to accept it, and put at our disposal every possible means to attain it. He stepped down from His heavenly throne, and hung on the infamous gibbet of Calvary as “the most abject of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with infirmity.” Why this degradation and condescension? Simply to plead with sinners to be saved.

“. . . I am he that blot out thy iniquities,” are the tones of divine love expostulating with the wilful, wayward sinner, “I am he that blot out thy iniquities, for my own sake, and I will not remember thy sins” (Isaias, xliii. 25). “I have blotted out thy iniquities as a cloud, and thy sins as a mist: return to me, for I have redeemed thee” (Isaias, xlv. 22).

“Come unto me,” saith the Lamb of God, Who taketh away the sins of the world—“Come unto me all you that labor and are heavily burdened, and I will refresh you.”

Meanwhile time rapidly glides away, soon we shall be on the shores of eternity, and then the only question will be: “Are we Christ’s, or are we not?”

Only those who come with palms of victory in their



hands, who fought the good fight, were washed and made white in His blood, and are clad in the white robes of His grace—those alone will stand in the presence of the glorified Son.



## XXVII. The Empty Tomb and the Risen Christ

NEVER in the history of the world did a cause seem more hopeless and more completely lost than that of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ on that first Good Friday. When dying, His last cry had been: "It is finished." And, apparently, He could have passed no truer verdict on His life's enterprise, for He seemed an utter failure, and His few adherents had left Him and fled. His career had been short-lived, His followers few and unfaithful, His mission a fiasco, and so death which ends everything appeared to have closed His enterprise. *Jesus dead!* The news had dashed to the ground all the pretensions and hopes of the fearful Disciples, for not one of them entertained the idea that their Master would ever rise again. If He had only done as was expected of the long-promised Messiah—if indeed He had even endeavored to realize their anticipations, how different everything might have been!

Words fail, and fail utterly, to give even a faint impression of the ignominy, disappointment and consternation which the Eleven experienced, when their hopes were blasted on the accursed tree of Calvary. Nothing remained for them but to go back to their homes and fishing, and try to forget—if the derisive world would let them—that their enthusiasm had prompted them to follow an impostor. In what other way could they eke out a miserable existence?

Of course, their hearts were still tenderly attached



to their Master, and, even if they had been a set of misguided visionaries, they felt that His ideals were undoubtedly admirable and worthy of imitation. As for the few pious women who had stood beneath His mock throne as He died, though they too were disappointed and discouraged, they still had heart enough to make provision for His fitting burial, for they had "bought sweet spices, that coming they might anoint Jesus" (Mark, xvi. 1).

Here we must recall that no sooner was it beyond doubt that Jesus was dead than Joseph of Arimathea obtained permission to bury the Body, and he had to hurry the preparations, because, after the sun had set, the Sabbath would have begun, and it was unlawful to bury the dead on that day. All that could be done was to "wash the corpse, wrap around it a white linen cloth, in the folds of which were scattered spices and ointments, while the feet, hands and face were bound with special bands." Having reverently placed the Body in the "sepulchre, that was hewed in stone, wherein no man had yet laid," a huge stone was rolled to the entrance. For the most part, the graves were cut out from the rocky hillside, and they were made so large that they would hold eight or even more bodies. In consequence of the dangers from the beasts of prey, the entrance was always blocked up with large heavy stones.

It was precisely the difficulty of rolling "the stone from the door of the sepulchre" that engaged the attention of "Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome," as early on the Sunday morning they hastened to the grave that they might render the last tribute of reverence to the body which had been buried so hurriedly on the Friday evening. In connection with this visit, we must note that it was



quite lawful to open the grave on the third day for the purpose of looking after the dead. Evidently, the pious women were convinced that, once they had overcome the difficulty of moving the stone, all would be well, and they would find the body of their Lord. They were equally mistaken in both their expectations. The stone proved no impediment, for that was already removed, but what must have been their horror and surprise when they found the grave empty! In her keen disappointment and unspeakable alarm, Mary Magdalen immediately "ran, therefore, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved," and told them of the disappearance of the Sacred Body. No sooner had the two disciples been apprised of the startling news than in their amazement they rushed off to ascertain if what they had heard was really true. John, who was younger than Peter, outran his companion, and reached the sepulchre first, whereupon, stooping down at the opening of the cave, he beheld the linen cloths but no Body. However, out of reverence and awe, he refrained from actually entering the tomb. But when Peter arrived some moments later, he, without any further ado, boldly made his way into the cave, and found the blood-stained linen—the "swathes that had bound the Sacred Limbs"—and the napkin that had been about the Head neatly folded in another place by itself. John then went in and realized to his consternation that the sepulchre was empty. After this they went home perplexed at this mysterious disappearance of the Body of Jesus.

The unmistakable tokens that the Body had not been violently taken away left a vivid and disturbed impression on the two disciples, and though it was likewise just as obvious that Jesus "had leisurely divested Himself of what no longer befitted Him," still



the idea of the resurrection was totally foreign to their thoughts.

However, Mary Magdalene could not drag herself away from Joseph's garden, for while doubt hung over the fate of her dear Lord's Body, her great agitation, anguish and alarm left her restless and disconsolate.

Once again she betook herself to the empty tomb, and gazing intently into the gloomy and forsaken precincts, she noticed two angels arrayed, in dazzling attire, one sitting at the head, while the other sat at the feet where but recently the dead Body had lain. Broken-hearted, crushed and bathed in tears, she remained still distracted and weighed down by her excessive affliction, so much so that even the wondrous appearance of the white-robed angels did not in any way startle her, or momentarily dispel the intensity of her grief. She was too completely absorbed in the one perplexing enigma.

Knowing full well what had happened, was it any wonder that the angels accosted her saying: "Woman, why weepest thou?"

To Mary this must have seemed a strange if not needless inquiry, but, as she was bent on obtaining the all-important information, naturally enough she replied: "Because they have taken away my Lord; and I know not where they have laid Him" (John, xx. 13).

Undoubtedly the glorious apparition of the heavenly messengers was of no interest or concern to her, for what she sought was the Dead Body of her Crucified Master.

No sooner had she spoken than she became conscious of another Presence very close to her, whereupon she turned and drew back a little to find a Man before her, Whom she took to be the gardener. This unknown intruder now in turn questioned her,



asking: "Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou?"

Not recognizing her Divine Master, and perhaps feeling hopeful that this gardener might be able to give her some information, she with deep pathos and intensity addressed him thus: "Sir, if thou hast taken Him away, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away."

Her question was not answered, but in tender and penetrating tones she heard instead her own name, "Mary," and at once the Voice told her that He who stood beside her was none other than her Lord and Master.

That one word spoken in such tender and familiar tones so thrilled and overpowered her, that in her amazement and tumult of joy she could only exclaim "Rabboni"—which in Hebrew means "my Master" or "O Master." Following this, her unconscious impulse was to take hold of her Divine Friend, and so make perfectly sure she was not the victim of some hallucination, but this spontaneous resolve was gently checked by Jesus telling her not to touch Him. He then gave her a commission to take to the disciples, and true to her trust she told her companions what had happened, but they would not accept her story.

The other women who likewise had found the tomb empty, were about to advise the disciples of the inexplicable incident, when they too were privileged to meet Jesus, who directed them to acquaint His "brethren" of His intended visit into Galilee, where they would "see" Him.

The third appearance was to Peter and John; while in the afternoon of the same day, Jesus accosted the two incredulous disciples who were going to Emmaus, some eight miles from the city.



Later He manifested Himself to the Disciples in the Upper Room, and standing in their midst, He gave them the message of peace, and it was on that memorable occasion that "He breathed on them, and He said to them: Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained" (John, xx. 22-23).

As Thomas was absent on this occasion, and doubting the reality of the Lord's presence, Jesus favored them with another apparition, in which He showed the unbelieving disciple the wounds in His hands and feet. These evidences, although we could cite others, amply suffice to establish our firm belief in Christ's Resurrection, which means that the Son of God after the dawn of the third day, by His own free will and power, came out of the tomb in glorious triumph, for His soul was again united to His Body.

Affrighted by the apparition of the Angel, and discovering that the tomb was empty, the guards hurried off to the city to inform the chief priests of this extraordinary happening. The Sanhedrin, on hearing this news, endeavored to bribe the soldiers to affirm that the Disciples had stolen the Body while they were asleep, and they connived at this ridiculous and impeachable fable. As St. Augustine aptly remarked, what was the good of bringing forward witnesses who were asleep, for, if such was the case, how did they know that the body was carried away? And if they were not asleep, why did they allow it to be carried away?

Surely it is more reasonable to admit that Christianity is the outcome of a miracle, than to imagine it to be born of roguery and deceit? Besides if it were based on some fallacious theory, then, like all schemes



and intrigues founded on ill-gotten and ill-proven premises, it would have long ago come to nought.

The most persistent and plausible explanation by moderns, is that the reappearance of Christ was simply and purely a vision, and belonged to the realm of imagination, and not of fact. Such an hypothesis of visions clashes with the most elementary principles of psychology, for how could those who were slow to believe the fact of the Resurrection have been the first to invent such a possibility? Is it at all probable that the same hallucination would have occurred to so many minds at once, and would have been repeated on so many occasions and in so varied places?

The death of Christ annihilated at one blow the Messianic ideals and expectations which the Apostles had previously entertained, while their belief in the truth of the Resurrection (with the later confirmation of the Holy Spirit) turned them from weak, vacillating and depressed men into fearless, indefatigable, and marvelous champions, and sent them to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Do people become heroes and lay down their lives for visionary theories? Could the whole fabric of Christianity have been built upon a groundwork of deception and delusion? Since the Resurrection may unhesitatingly be pronounced as the best and most widely established fact in history, it is certainly unwise to accept the views of a few extremists when tradition and the majority of the race profess a belief in a truth which is so vital to mankind at large.

However, instead of urging the inadequacy and futility of the various man-made speculations in support of which the originators have not been prepared to make any sacrifices or lay down their lives, let us make the appalling supposition that Christ did not rise



from the dead. The best preface to this conjecture is the testimony of St. Paul, who unhesitatingly affirmed: "If Christ be not risen again then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" (I Cor., xv. 14).

But there are other alarming consequences which must necessarily follow if we deny the reality of the stupendous fact of the Resurrection. If Christ be not risen, death has absolute power over the world, every grave is sealed for ever, and death is the signal of eternal sleep. Then the prophecies which predicted the various characteristics, incidents and consequences of the life of the promised Messiah, predicted also His Resurrection, as the Royal Psalmist says: "Nor wilt thou give thy Holy One to see corruption" (Ps., xv, 10).

If He did not rise, these prophecies are superfluous, extravagant and false, and merely the fancy notions of some mistaken minds. If this miracle of the Resurrection is an error or myth, then all the other miracles as recorded in the Gospels must likewise be the outcome of deception or imagination.

Then the Scriptures are rent in every part; the prophecies, songs, Gospels, Acts, Epistles and revelations too are torn to strips.

There would be no authority for Scripture and no truth in it—no Son of God dying by His own consent, and rising again for the glory of God and for the welfare and salvation of man.

These are the things which men affirm who deny the Resurrection—men who ignore history and tradition, ignore the confirmatory testimony of nineteen centuries of Christianity, and destroy the sole basis on which modern civilization was established and the only basis on which it can survive.

But Christ is risen from the dead, and through



Him the horizons of life are widened, the heavens are open and the glory of God comes into view. Let the lesson which we draw from this most marvelous event of our Lord's career, be that which St. Paul drew for himself and the Christians of the early church: "If you be risen with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God" (Col., iii. 1). Let us look for the things that are above, and not for the things which are upon the earth.

When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we appear with Him in glory.

Let us therefore mortify ourselves and our members. Let us discard all those things that hamper us—anger, malice, blasphemy and the like. Let us strip ourselves of the old Adam with all his actions. Let us rise from our old selves and put on the new man, who will be the image of Him who created us, and who arose from the tomb.



## XXVIII. The Great Forty Days

SOME days had elapsed since the Great Tragedy, and the scene is once more by the blue Lake of Genesareth. In consequence of the promise of the Risen Christ to meet His disciples in Galilee, they had returned to their old associations amid the familiar surroundings. It was probably to Capharnaum that they repaired, and the fact that Peter had a house there, strengthens this likelihood. Since the Apostles no longer had any common purse, for that had ceased with Judas, the only suitable means of obtaining a livelihood was to resume their old occupation of fishing. At any rate the present episode was introduced by Peter's proposal to go fishing, which suggestion prompted the six other disciples to join him.

It was late in the evening—because night was the best time for fishing—that Peter and his companions eventually set out on the familiar old lake in their fishing boat. All the long night through they plied their old craft up and down the lake, putting out and taking in their net, but they caught nothing. At early dawn, worn out and disappointed with their laborious and futile efforts, they decided to put into shore, when they descried a Stranger standing on the pebbly beach. It was Jesus, but they did not recognize Him, even when He asked: “Children, have you any meat?”

Of course it was in no way unusual that any one should come to them for the purpose of purchasing their catch, as in the East it was quite common to sell even a single fish to any would-be buyer. When they



had assured the Stranger that they had no fish, He directed them "to cast the net on the right side of the ship" when they would find plenty. They did as they were bidden, and so great was the haul that they were not able to draw up the net.

This miraculous draught, no doubt, recalled the well-remembered and similar episode which took place on the same Lake of Genesareth in the early days of their acquaintance with the Lord. At any rate the incident made it quite clear who the Stranger was, for John whispered to Peter: "It is the Lord!"

That was sufficient for the warm-hearted and enthusiastic Apostle, who drawing around him his garment threw himself into the water, and made his way to the shore. The other disciples, however, followed in the boat, dragging after them the net laden with fishes. On the strand a bright fire was burning, with some fish on it, and there was also a quantity of bread. Jesus then bade the disciples to get some of the fishes which they had caught, whereupon Peter dragged the haul to the shore, numbering we are told about one hundred and fifty-three in all.

Though they felt convinced that the Stranger was none other than their Risen Lord, still they durst not ask Him Who He was. At the invitation of Jesus they all sat down to partake of the meal, and forthwith He distributed the bread and the fish amongst them just as formerly, though His changed appearance seemed to overawe them.

No sooner had they finished, than our Blessed Lord turned towards Peter, and asked: "Simon, son of John, lovest thou Me more than these?"

At these words, spoken so gently yet so appealingly, the impetuous and boastful Apostle doubtless went back in thought to another occasion when by the fire



He had denied His Master, and now, when he was being apparently challenged as to his loyalty and love, he must have felt a deep sense of self-reproach. His recent fall, in spite of his almost defiant protestation that he would never forsake His Lord and Master, must have made him momentarily hesitate before he answered Jesus's question. If he had said "yes," such a reply might have appeared arrogant and valueless; if "no," then he would have been giving utterance to nothing but a lie, for he was all on fire with love for his Divine Friend. Accordingly, he felt he would be giving greater confidence and satisfaction by giving an emphatic and detailed confirmation of his love, hence he said: "Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love Thee" (John, xxi. 15).

Recent failure had taught him humility, and, with that regrettable incident ever in mind, he did not assert or claim to be more devoted to His Master than the others. Yet he did not wish Jesus to doubt or discredit the intensity and incomparableness of his affection and esteem.

Peter's ardent reply not only protested his absolute love and undivided attachment to Jesus, but it took into further consideration that divine knowledge, which could give better assurance than any words of his. In characteristic and unmistakable terms, our Lord solemnly commanded him to "feed My lambs"—in other words, He gave him the charge of the whole flock.

As though He desired more corroborative evidence of Peter's unfailing devotion, a second time the self-same question was repeated, but without reference to the others. Thinking that his dear Master was really doubting the worth of his protestation, he once again appealed to that source from which nothing is hidden,



and therefore with greater vehemence than previously avowed: "Yea Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee." Then said Jesus: "Feed My lambs."

Yet a third time did Christ repeat the same question, perhaps desiring to have a triple protestation of love to compensate for his triple denial. Peter's former confusion now gave place to grief, and, as if he could no longer bear the strain, he exclaimed with humility and distress: "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee."

Obviously Jesus did not for one moment doubt the sincerity of Peter's love, for each time He followed up His question with a commission to take charge of the whole faithful, but on this the third occasion, he was given the care of the pastors also: "Feed My sheep."

The promise made to Peter at Cæsarea Philippi that he should be the foundation and supreme ruler of the whole Church here on earth, was now fully realized by his public elevation to the office of Supreme Pastor of all the faithful. Here then is the confirmation of Peter as Prince of the Apostles, which implies that to him was committed full and absolute authority over the whole flock—in other words, the immediate, supreme and universal power of teaching, governing and spiritualizing all the members of the Kingdom of Christ. This office demanded infallibility in all matters of faith and morals, for, unless there is an unerring guide, all sanction becomes futile, and the sheep are as a flock without a shepherd.

How is the Shepherd going to feed his sheep, and what is the pasture? The divinely-given food for the flock, was, what we call today, the seven Sacraments, which are the outward signs or ceremonies ordained by Christ whereby grace is conveyed to the soul.

It is well to remark and emphasize here that our



Divine Saviour did not fail to mention His impending departure. He intended, therefore, leaving His Apostles and their successors a pledge of His eternal interest in His foundation; He intended leaving to them the means of carrying out His command to feed the lambs and the sheep. The forty days He passed among them before His disappearance from their sight were then consecrated to the giving of final instructions to His Apostles, and to the framing of the constitution of the Church in its fundamental essence—to the teaching of the Sacraments.

The Church has ever and always maintained the Seven Sacraments: these are the seven most efficacious aids to attain the purpose of a Christian's existence here below, which is none other than his personal sanctification. This belief has always been that of the Church, and it is upheld by the authority of Scripture and tradition, while the universal and daily practice likewise confirms this time-honored view. Of course these ceremonies confer holiness, not through any natural power, but through a special efficacy lent them by God, as they are the divinely-appointed means which He ordained for the applying of grace to the soul.

The Sacraments are for men, and, as fallen man is such a creature of sense, it was imperative that sensible signs should be employed to lead him from sensible things, through sensible things, to spiritual things. We cannot, for our everyday needs, do without the visible signs of invisible truths and facts, for these are a necessity of our composite nature.

During Christ's public ministry He never gave His hearers abstract doctrines and the bare forms of truth, but presented everything in the concrete, "all clothed, as it were, in flesh and blood." He took the familiar



things of earth, and made them the instruments of heavenly training, ever using Nature's key to unlock the mysteries of the spiritual kingdom. The disciples and His followers needed not only to receive spiritual doctrine, but also a spiritual influence: in other words, *grace* as well as *truth* had to be communicated to them.

Hence Christ made action and matter reinforce word, and instituted those more perfect forms of spiritual development—the Sacraments proper of the Gospel—to be, not signs only, but *effective signs* of spiritual blessing, which would in very deed apply the merits of His Passion and in very deed convey the graces of His Spirit to the soul of the believer in Him.

Just as smoke is the natural sign of fire, water of cleansing, and oil of soothing, each Sacrament is a practical sign of the particular grace which is being applied to the soul. In the Holy Eucharist we partake of what appears to be bread, which is our natural nourishment, and thereby is conveyed the notion that the soul is being fed in the spiritual order.

In the administration of each Sacrament, two important elements are necessary, viz. the *matter* and *form*, of which both together make up the sensible sign of grace. The *matter* in a vague manner signifies the effect of the particular Sacrament, while the *form* does it more distinctly. Thus, water may be used for various and many purposes beside washing, but the form of words "I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," specifies in detail the purpose for which it is employed in Baptism.

As each Sacrament has a grace peculiar and proper to each of man's spiritual requirements, we must not fail to see in this the wonderful testimony of the Divine Solitude. From the cradle to the grave this



heavenly assistance is ever at hand, helping, encouraging and prompting us along the narrow path of duty, and thus preparing us for eternity. No sooner is a child born than the curse of Adam is upon it. That stain must be removed, hence the purifying waters of Baptism are poured on its infantile brow, and through their regenerating efficacy it at once becomes a child of God and heir to the eternal mansions.

Time takes its course and that child begins to feel the inner struggle between right and wrong, between conscience and passion, and Christ who loves and treasures that soul again comes to its aid through the Sacrament of Confirmation, whereby it is equipped and strengthened to battle against the wiles and the assaults of the powerful Evil One.

Perchance that Christ-redeemed soul fails to live up to the God-given ideal, and unfortunately falls into serious mortal sin. What then, is it left by the way-side bruised, wounded and dying? Indeed, no; it is told to take courage, seek consolation and be of good cheer. Accordingly the soul betakes itself to the sacred tribunal of Penance where it discloses in every detail the sad, humiliating and all-condemning story of wantonness, defeat and despair; and, when the minister of God has heard that fine act of self-accusation, he pronounces sentence of forgiveness and acquittal, and bids that comforted and hopeful soul go in peace and sin no more.

As the journey to the heavenly Jerusalem is at times tedious and most exhausting, and as the soul becomes famished and would fall out and die of starvation and weakness, a Divine Food is provided so that all nourished thereby may plod faithfully on, in spite of every obstacle and setback. The Bread of Life and the very Blood of God are given to all, so that, par-



taking of these Divine Gifts, the soul is able to persevere to the end. The devout and frequent, if not daily, approach to the Holy Table makes man fit to cope with all the demands of his various occupations, duties and trials, and, what is still more efficacious, enables him to grow up in virtue and cultivate a stronger love of his Divine Master.

Then when that young heart begins to feel the impulse and influence of love, rather than let such a beautiful God-implanted instinct run riot and become a lustful passion, he is advised and prompted to supernaturalize such yearnings by consecrating it to God in the holy Sacrament of Matrimony. In instituting such a contract Christ sanctified the union between man and woman, thereby vouchsafing further graces and aids to enable those who plighted their troth at God's altar to live up to the sanctity and to the dignity of their state. Not only are they mutually assisted to live in happiness, peace and concord, but they are able to bring up their children in the love and fear of God, and thus form a hallowed household which in every respect is a source of honor to God, a credit to the church and a glory to the land.

But it may be that the young man aims still higher, and wishes to give and devote his love entirely and unconditionally to the service of his God, by becoming "a priest forever." Then, Christ bids him dedicate his holy aspirations and ambitions in the sanctuary of His temple.

Not merely through life, but even into the unknown realms of eternity did Christ anticipate and cater to the wants of man. Hence, when death is nigh, there is the Last Unction for the wayfarer to nerve him for the final struggle and equip him with hope and strength. Then at length, as he lays down the burden of life, and



must needs go forth to meet his God and his all-knowing and all-searching Judge, what terrors for him have the throes of death and the busy evil spirits? The departing soul goes forth "in the name of God the Father who created him," "in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, Who suffered and died for him"; and "in the name of the Holy Ghost Who sanctified him."

Thus we see that our loving Saviour Jesus Christ, our dear Master and Divine Friend, has vouchsafed to institute and leave us easy access to helps and encouragements along the path of life, whereby we may become purified, spiritualized, sanctified and eventually glorified. Therefore, we cannot more fitly conclude this brief survey of Christ's priceless and all-sufficing tokens of His undying love than by expressing our heartfelt and prompt appreciation of these marvelous proofs of love which are offered to all without exception.

The best and the most satisfactory evidence of our real appreciation can take but one unmistakable form, and it is none other than that of the faithful utilization of these channels of God's mercy. The danger is, and often enough the fact remains, that because of the easy approach to the Sacraments, we are apt to take them for granted and to undervalue their worth and their marvelous significance.

Since they form part of the birthright of every Catholic, we are inclined to regard and use them in a manner which ill becomes their dignity and efficacy, and to thank the Son of the living God for these powerful sources of eternal gain and sanctity becomes a task which we often entirely neglect. Let us remember how highly indebted we are to the mercy and goodness of God for these unfailing sources of grace and eternal reward, and, when we recall and recognize how many



are actually deprived of such admirable benefits, we should be prompted to appreciate our preferment and privileges by repeated sterling acts of gratitude and dutiful recognition.

It is well and opportune that we bear in mind that, as the Jews of old were rejected and left to a just and stern retribution because they did not accept the Gift of God, so also we, if we do not take advantage of the necessary means appointed by His goodness, shall suffer a fate similar to that meted out to the hard-hearted deicides. It only remains, therefore, that accepting and valuing the advice of St. Paul we "go with confidence" [by means of the sacraments] to the throne of grace, that we may [through them] obtain mercy, and find grace in seasonable aid" (Heb., iv. 16).



## XXIX. The Close of Christ's Earthly Sojourn

FROM the early ages of Christianity, there has been an annual and significant custom in the Church of blessing on Holy Saturday what is known as the Paschal Candle. This candle is usually of large proportions, and five grains of incense are fixed in it by the deacon in memory of the five wounds of our crucified Saviour. Throughout the forty days of the Easter season this candle is lighted at the principal public services of the Church to remind us of the light of the Risen Christ, who continued to manifest Himself on various occasions to His Apostles and disciples. These different apparitions proved to His timid followers that Jesus had really risen from the dead as He had predicted, and it also helped to increase the number of disciples. We now come to His last interview which occurred on the very day of His Ascension.

The Eleven had returned to Jerusalem, and, as they were assembled in the Upper Room, Jesus suddenly appeared in their midst and addressed them. Some doubt and disbelief still prevailed amongst the Apostles, and their Divine Master "upbraided them with their incredulity and hardness of heart," because, during the forty days that had elapsed since His Crucifixion, He had given them visible proof of His presence.

With divine authority and sovereign majesty He spoke to the assembled followers of His Messianic



power, pointing out that, as His heavenly Father had duly commissioned Him to be the Lord and Master of His kingdom on earth, so with similar authority He as the Son of God commissioned them to carry on and spread His great work of Redemption. As His deputed representatives, they were to take the Gospel message to all peoples of every land and clime, and especially were they to preach His Resurrection, as the proof of His Divinity. Not a human teaching, but a belief in the Gospel and acceptance of Baptism constituted the universal and indispensable law of salvation, and they who were the living and divinely-appointed teachers were to guard, explain and transmit His revealed doctrine.

To encourage the Apostles and give them every assurance of divine supervision and intervention in their herculean and humanly speaking impossible task, there was a God-given guarantee of assistance from on high, and this remarkable and adequate patronage was to safeguard and direct not only the Apostles in their work, but also their successors even to the consummation of the world. From this it is obvious that the divine commission to spread God's kingdom was not a temporary trust or one that was confined to any particular age, but was for each and every duly authorized preacher of the Gospel who had at heart the salvation of souls.

As an authentic approbation of such a spiritual charge and to render the divine revelation credible, the gift of miracles was attached to the teaching office, and this prodigious power proclaimed in an incontestable fashion the omnipotence of Him who promised and bestowed such a boon. By means of this miracle-working asset, the Apostles were better able to prevail on their converts to accept and treasure the true faith



and all that it implied; and at the same time it was to serve as a safe and impenetrable defence against the attacks of the pagan, when Providence deemed it needful that His holy cause and not brute force should prevail.

Proceeding, the Risen Lord emphasized the verified testimony of Moses, the inspired utterances of the prophets and the remarkable records of the Royal Psalmist who had given expression to clear and unimpeachable predictions concerning Him and His Messianic mission. He also took occasion to refer to Himself as the suffering and triumphant Messiah, and He concluded His momentous discourses by assuring them that, in undertaking the responsibility of establishing and propagating His holy religion, they would be endowed with the strength and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

He then told them to follow Him, and, choosing that most familiar of routes, led the way out of the city over the brook Kedron, past the dark olive grove of Gethsemane, and by way of Bethany to the summit of Mount Olivet. This was the spot which He had chosen for His final interview with the disciples ere He ascended in glory to His eternal Father. Doubtless their hearts were agitated by anxious concern and affection, for they must have felt that the recent wondrous and awesome intercourse presaged some impending crisis. The very locality was most dear to the heart of Jesus, for it recalled so many affecting scenes in the final days prior to His Crucifixion. It is certainly very significant too that, from the very spot where He made His triumphant entry into Jerusalem, He was now about to make His triumphant entry into the heavenly Jerusalem.

✓ Divining that this was to be their farewell interview with the Holy One of God, they were prompted to ask



Him one more question before He left them, as they were still possessed of the idea of the establishment of a great earthly kingdom. Hence they desired to know, for their own personal satisfaction, in what year and on what day precisely He intended to restore in all its glory and fulness of power the Kingdom of Israel. The disciples thus showed that even yet they entertained and clung to narrow and national views regarding the Messiah and His mission.

Such curiosity and apparent solicitude ill became them, for their task and duty lay in another direction, as they had the divinely-appointed commission of establishing and consolidating the spiritual Kingdom of Christ. This responsibility with the work, hardships and indefatigability which it entailed, did not imply any share of the glories and triumphs of a temporal prince, but more than likely involved cruel opposition, deadly persecution, and even violent martyrdom. Their mission was to await the descent of the Holy Ghost and then, filled with strength and zeal, go forth and bear witness to their Divine Master throughout the then-known world, which was reeking with paganism and idolatry.

His farewell message had been given, the time for His final departure had come. Raising His Divine Hands, not to give the signal for the approach of the angelic host who were to conduct Him to His Father, but to render His last appearance more solemn and majestic in the minds of the assembled disciples, He finally blessed them, and, whilst they were reverently gazing upon their glorified Master, He was taken up into heaven. The parting words which He used on this memorable occasion are not recorded, though we may believe that, whatever was said to the privileged worshippers, were engraved on the hearts of all.



What termination could be better suited to the God-Man who had left His heavenly home to found the Kingdom of God on earth? As the disciples still gazed intently and devoutly with upturned faces on the bright cloud which received their Lord and God and eventually concealed Him from their sight, two angels arrayed in white appeared before them, and confronted them saying: "Ye men of Galilee why stand you looking to heaven? This Jesus who is taken from you into heaven, shall so come as you have seen Him going into heaven" (Acts, i. 11).

At the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, angels were heard singing in adoring sympathy with the priceless self-sacrifice of God; now that the three-and-thirty years of a wondrous earthly sojourn had drawn to a close, angels again similarly announced the glorious return of the triumphant Redeemer. After profoundly adoring their God, Master and Friend, the disciples returned with great joy to the city of Jerusalem, there to await the coming of the Holy Spirit. Here we cannot fail to observe how Christ had given yet another unmistakable proof of His Divinity, and how this mystery demonstrates His equality with the Father, since of His own accord and power He had ascended to Him and was assumed to supreme honor, sitting at the right hand of God on high.

It is worthy of note and reflection that, ere He returned to His heavenly Father, He committed to His chosen followers the self-same mission which He Himself had received: "All power is given to Me in heaven and in earth. As the Father has sent Me, so I also send you. . . . Going therefore, teach ye all nations, . . . and behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world."

Such then was the commission of the Church, and



here too was the promise of the protecting presence of special assistance, which invested her in her teaching office with infallibility. Her mission was Christ's mission, and her work was to continue His. Hence she had the duty, authority and jurisdiction to teach, to convert, to regenerate, to sanctify and to save souls. She had to call all men to the true belief; she had to proclaim His doctrines, and she had to offer new life and hope to all; and, in spite of every opposition from within and without, and even though human passions, persecution and the gates of Hell might assail her, she would live and flourish and do her Founder's work in the world. Though she was human in her members, and therefore capable of suffering from false friends, treachery and open violence, yet, because she was divine in her origin, in her mission and in her power, Christ commissioned her to be the custodian and herald of His truth. ✓

Accordingly, when the Church undertook the work of teaching, expounding and defending His revelation, one eminent prerogative and one essential claim was necessary to her existence and welfare. And that indispensable characteristic was her infallibility. Hence it was that the Church in her office of teacher, and in consequence of the fulfillment of the commission given to her, received a divine assurance that she could not and would not err or lead others into error, and, to accomplish and safeguard this vital guarantee, she is ever assisted, protected and directed by the Holy Spirit. By virtue of this divine providence which governs all her teachings and decisions in matters of Christian faith and morals, all those who were privileged to receive and accept Her claims could promptly and unhesitatingly submit, because her word was authoritative and final.



Surely, every reasonable seeker after truth will recognize that it is only consistent with the Revelation of Christ that He should safeguard and preserve from corruption, misinterpretation and error all that is contained and involved in that deposit. When her Divine Founder commissioned the Church to be His one and unfailing teacher, He was at liberty to appoint her as fallible or infallible guide. Which alternative then would we expect Him to select?

If the Church is not invested with this vital characteristic, the original integrity and purity of Christ's revelation is not immune from error; and, if she is liable to substitute her own views and opinions for doctrine, then there can be no obligation in conscience to believe her doctrines or to execute her commands.

Now as Christ said that "he that believeth not shall be condemned," it follows that His teacher which is the Church must be an unerring witness and guide, as otherwise man will have no guarantee for believing. Finally, if there cannot be an unquestioning assent to any article of faith, there would be doubt, and such a contingency destroys all belief, and this would leave Christ's commissioned teacher no teacher at all.



### XXX. The Expediency of Christ's Departure

LATE on Maundy Thursday evening, just before Christ and His Apostles were about to leave the Upper Room, He gave utterance to a most sublime discourse. Naturally enough, His disciples were filled with alarm and indescribable anguish at the impending crisis and heartrending separation. Consequently, their Divine Master took occasion to inspire them with courage and confidence. Accordingly, they were admonished to put trust in the Father and also in Himself, and as a further motive for unswerving faith He promised to send the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, the Comforter who would be their great support and strength, the light of their intellects, the fire of their hearts, and the pledge of their success.

As they noticed indications of His troubled spirit, grief filled their hearts as they gazed on the countenance of the sorrowful Jesus. He knew the awful road which He was about to travel, and which was to lead Him down into the dark, dreary valley of death. But mark the love of Jesus, for though He knew all this, He did not shrink from the trial, nor endeavor to evade the crushing burden of pain, agony and torture. Yet, while not seeking or craving comfort for Himself, He strove to console the hearts of His intimidated and anxious disciples. In anticipation of His Passion and death, He did not fail to assure them in consoling lan-



guage of His provision for them, when He would be taken away. He promised them that He would not leave them orphans and comfortless, He foretold the coming of the Holy Ghost whom the Father would send in His name, Who would teach them all things, and bring all things to their mind whatsoever He should have said to them.

After Christ's Ascension, the Apostles went back to Jerusalem there to await the performance of His promise. They spent these ten days in prayer and pious preparation with the Mother of Jesus. During this interlude Peter for the first time exercised his duty as the Chief of the Apostles, by filling in the Apostolic college the vacancy created by the treachery and the sin of Judas. They chose by lot, and after invoking the Lord who knew the hearts of all men, Matthias was selected to replace the fallen Apostle, who had gone to "his own place."

On the morning of the tenth day, the disciples to the number of one hundred and twenty were assembled as usual at prayer. This day, called the Feast of Pentecost, was set apart by the Jews for the solemn commemoration of the Promulgation of the Law on Mount Sinai. Multitudes of the Jews from every region filled the Holy City on that day, and such was the occasion chosen by Jesus to reveal to all nations His Church—such was the festival on which He decreed to inaugurate the New Law. Early in the morning, a great noise as of a raging wind filled the whole room in which the disciples were assembled, and fiery tongues like unto flames appeared, and separated to settle over every one in the assembly.

Thus, under the appearance of fire, came the Paraclete to give the disciples His heavenly gifts, to give them wisdom to interpret the Scriptures, fortitude



to face their enemies, and the gift of tongues so that they might execute the commands of their Master to go and teach all nations.

The result of these heavenly gifts was to change the Apostles from pusillanimous and weak men who lived in fear of the Jews to intrepid preachers of the Word. They now became fearless; their only desire now was to face the Jews and to give resolute testimony of all they had witnessed, and to reprove Israel for its incredulity. Carrying out this resolve, they immediately set forth, and using the miraculous gift of tongues, Peter standing up with the eleven other Apostles harangued the multitude, and converted that day about three thousand souls. Such were the immediate results of the coming of the Holy Spirit—results which were to continue and to increase throughout all nations and all times.

“It is expedient to you that I go: for if I go not, the Paraclete will not come to you: but if I go, I will send Him to you” (John, xvi. 7). The presence of the Lord, far from having taught His Apostles the true notion of His salvation, had actually been a hindrance to its conception. It was for their highest good that He should leave them and supply them with the necessary motive to long after Him as a spiritual Being. What He had taught them, was important; but so far it had produced only partial effect upon their inward lives. He was the impersonation of Divine Truth, but they could rise no higher than the visible manifestation of that truth. It was important to them that the truth should plant itself deep in their thoughts and feelings, and grow up to influence their dispositions and actions, and manifest itself as the ruling force of their lives. This could be best accomplished if He departed and exposed its necessity.



Nor was it for their personal interest alone that the Paraclete should come; for they had also an official position and character which would be affected by whatever affected them personally. They were to be the administrators of the Lord's Household.

The great attributes of the Paraclete's office were: to be the Comforter to the Apostles and to convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. Comfort was the most pressing need which the Apostles now felt, and this Comforter would abide with and comfort every one of them under all the changes and vicissitudes of life: He was just such a comforting Father and Brother as they all needed.

The reason of Christ's coming was twofold: the Redemption of man and his sanctification.

The work of Redemption was finished by our Lord Jesus Christ; for it was His special work to redeem the soul from sin. This work of Redemption was completed when He died on the Cross and arose from the dead.

The work of sanctification is not visible as was the work of Redemption: it is hidden in the soul. The spirit of man must come in contact with the Spirit of God, and this is abundantly brought about through the special presence and assistance of the Spirit of God among men. Such was to be the mission of the Holy Ghost. We thus see the expediency of Christ's departure, and the reason why He promised the Apostles, and through them all His followers, that He would send them a Comforter, Who would abide with them for ever.

Let us see whether and in what manner the Church is carrying out the command of Christ to go and teach all nations. Let us examine how she is co-operating with the work of the Holy Ghost as explained by her



Founder—the sanctification of men's souls. Compare the Church of to-day with the assembly on that morning of Pentecost almost nineteen centuries ago. To-day her children are counted by the millions; every land from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof is regenerated and ennobled by the spread of her life-giving doctrines. Every nation from the Parthians and Medes of long ago to the native tribes of modern Africa and America is benefiting by the light of that true civilization which she was the first to shed upon them. That she has co-operated and still continues an active co-operation with the Holy Spirit, is made clear to us by a cursory glance at past ages and modern times. Not only has she given the means of sanctification to her children, not only has she sanctified them, but she has raised many of them to an heroic and unparalleled degree of holiness.

In the early centuries of her existence, we see the faith and the purity of an Agnes or a Cecilia, the fortitude of a Sebastian, the repentance of an Augustine, the conversion of a Constantine. Nearer home we may witness the faith and the heroic sacrifice of a Beckett, an Oliver Plunket, a Jogues and a Rasle. Our own times can testify to the sublime virtue of a Curé d'Ars, a Little Flower, a Gabriel of the Passion, and a Pius X.

Everywhere we see the spirit of God working in the Catholic Church, everywhere we find that the blood of martyrs has been the seed of Christians. Barbarians are civilized, refined and converted; our social life is purified; the conditions of our working man are improved, and his burdens are lightened; the poor are cared for, and woman is the recognized companion and equal of man. Today as ever, the Church teaches us what to do, what to believe, what to avoid, and what to hope for, if we wish to be saved. Thus to this very



day the Church, as the Spouse of Christ, is co-operating with the Spirit of His Truth in the sanctification of man.

The angels who appeared to the Apostles to console them for the departure of their Master, said to them: "This Jesus . . . shall so come as you have seen Him going into heaven." Thus, my brethren, are we told that Christ shall come again. The Gospels have shown us Christ the Merciful, the Redeemer, the Saviour. They have shown us Christ coming to save and redeem a world steeped in ignorance and in error; they have shown us Christ a God born in a stable, living a Life of poverty, toil and humiliation—a Christ teaching us, suffering for us, and dying for us as a Crucified Criminal on the ignominious tree at Calvary. They describe the world that Christ came into, and the life He led some nineteen centuries ago to show us the way to salvation and to heaven.

Will His second coming resemble His first appearance amongst us? Will He then be coming into a world with the excuse of ignorance—a world yearning for His coming as a merciful Redeemer? Will He then come as a meek and lowly Child to save us from the consequences of our rejection of Him?

No! Then He will come as a mighty King and a just Judge surrounded by His angels, and in all the majesty of His omnipotence. No longer will He be the bleeding Figure on His Cross of Suffering, but the Creator on His throne of glory, demanding from His creatures an exact and minute account of how they have used the merits of His life here below—of His Passion and Death undergone for their salvation.

May that day, my brethren, be for us the "Great Day!" Oh! may it not be the "Day of Wrath and of Great Bitterness"! Let it be our care from now that



on that Great Day a place may be found for us among the Sheep—that we may be placed on the right hand of that terrible Majesty.

To attain this happy conclusion to our existence, to be able to aspire with some confidence to be included amongst the blessed, let us not merely be grateful to that providence which has placed us in the one Ark of Salvation; let us not merely contemplate the Life of Christ, but let it be our earnest endeavor to make this Life of Lives our model.

By the practical realization of the model which He has set up for our imitation, we shall manifest our gratitude for what Christ has done for us. We shall use His Sacraments; we shall practice all the virtues of which He has been, and is the Living Model. We shall cling to the Bark of Peter; we shall keep the faith; we shall fight the good fight. Our occasional wounds will be washed in the Blood of the Lamb. We shall follow Him wherever He leads, so that, on that last "Day of Days," we shall stand before Him clothed in white robes and with palms of victory in our hands, confident that, thanks to His blood, we shall be found worthy to join forever, the angelic choirs in their canticle of worship and praise: "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord, God of Hosts."











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